

ALLBLACK

— Project —

*“What will you see
when you’re dead?”*

Last night I woke up without any recollection of what happened to me, just like I was born yesterday. But then again, you can't prove the existence of “past.” You could have just been born right now and your whole memory was fabricated.

That is what I am feeling right now; lost, confused, and unsure. So yes, I might have just been born last night, but somehow my “past” is chasing me. I can't remember it, but apparently I caused a private aircraft to crash.

Damn, I wish I can just remember something! My name, I don't even remember my own name! But why? Why instead of my own name, I know who is responsible for what happened to me?

That's not all, I'm not even sure that I am human. Not after what happened today. I literally stopped rain. No, not like that. I didn't turn the weather from pouring to sunny, no. But I, how do I put it... I made thousands of raindrops cease to fall, suspending them into the air as if gravity don't work around me.

...

I understand, I think I will have to put an end to this.

My name is ———, let me tell you a story about me.

Phase
#1

Story
Art
Ekkigo

“fsc” Augustus

Phase
#1

ALLBLACK

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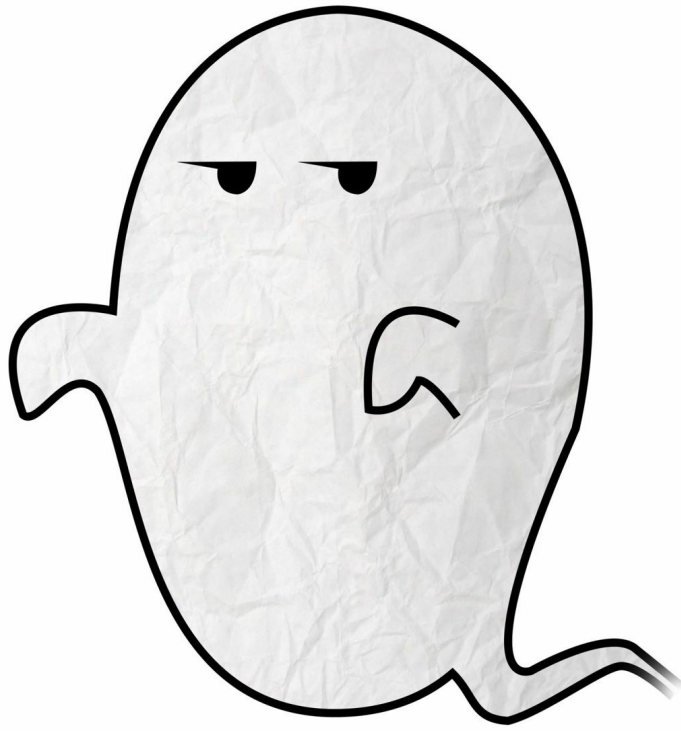
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Anssen “fsc” Augustus

I majored in neurology, once I fell for this girl, she majored in engineering. We were clicking, we exchanged knowledge, but things were not working between us socially. I once told her that emotion is basically electric signal conducting through the nerves throughout our bodies, it was funny when we had to break up while each of us holding to an end of a coil. (Lie)

ALLBLACK

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Anssen “*fsc*” Augustus

ALLBLACK

— PHASE#1 // Project —

Nous

19 June 2010

Location unknown

Time unknown

“What will you see when you're dead?”

A chain of words crossed onto my mind as I glared powerlessly toward a charade of gray and white on the raging and storming sky. This view was the first thing I saw after whatever happened to me, and for who knows I had been passed out. That chain of words was also the first thing I thought. I didn't know why, might had been just the way of my mind telling me that I was still alive.

But still, what will I see when I die? My mind is too weak to imagine such what If. The question remained unanswered, however seeing that I was not staring into nothing must be the sure sign that I was indeed, alive. I could only blink while my whole body felt like it was swung up and down without touching any solid surface. I was not falling, it was something else.

My whole body felt wet all over, my whole body was wrapped in a damp, thick fabric. Raindrops fell onto my face and bounced off, while my damp clothes absorbed them. As my body kept swinging up and down I began to realize that I am currently drifting on storming ocean with raging sky above me, all alone.

My hearing slowly began to recover, the only noise I could hear was the sound of how the heaven sent raindrops failed trying to pierce the salty heap of the sea. It was no music, but it actually sounded beautiful to me. I admired how the ocean showed her mercy for me. Despite the raging storm and the rise and fall of tides, the ocean never even for once rolled me inside her mighty waves.

I could have drowned any moment, but it would seem the sea had her own plan. Scientifically speaking, my body's mass is not enough to press against the

intensity of ocean's salt waters; that is why I was not sinking. But still, I couldn't help but think whether there was anything else in the work here.

To be honest, I didn't think I will survive this situation. Being alone in such a vast place, even if I were to squeeze my voice out, I doubt that someone would hear my desperate scream.

“ ... ”

I tried it, even. I tried to force my voice out, nothing came out. The hopelessness of the situation, the cold within the damp cloth which wrapped my frail skin, the soothing sway of ocean calming from a storm's lullaby, and the chiaroscuro the sky played as the rolling clouds which hid its true heaven faded to clear sky had somnolent effect to which my weak body was unable to resist. Slowly but surely, my eyes were losing their battle against sleepiness.





“ ... ”

“Someone is floating out here!”

“ ... ”

“Help him!”

“ ... ”

“Ready?! Hoist!”

“ ... ”

“Is he alive?!”

“Is he breathing?!”

“How did he ended up here?!”

“ ... ”

“His heartbeat is too weak!”

“ ... ”

[...]

“ ... ”

“We have done what we can, the rest is up to him...”

“ ... ”

Perhaps it was just a dream, I thought I heard some noise entering my sense of hearing during my dreamless rest. Despite the deep sleep I was in, I began to regain my function. But it was not yet enough to wake me, instead my mind began to dream. Not a wild dream where I went through something I never had during a pitiful moments of inability we call ‘reality.’ But a dream which felt so real it trapped me inside and gave me hard time differing which was real and which was not.

The lids of my eyes began to raise, both of my eyeballs recognised a wooden desk right in front of me. Meanwhile my own self was sitting on a chair with my hands resting on its arms. As I slowly raised my head, I could feel a small knockback from my motion. My body felt like rotating a bit, just then I realised

that I was sitting on some kind of rotating chair.

“You awake?”

A sound had alarmed me, for a second I frantically turned around to see where it came from. But instead of finding it, I realised another bizarre fact; the place I was in was literally nowhere. The chair, the desk, and me were placed in a vast room where the floor was black bottomless while the ceiling was topless grey and the walls, if there was any, was borderless shades of gradient between black and grey.

“Please, do not panic. Remember that I've promised not to hurt you.”

Abruptly I stood from the chair where I sit, again looking where that voice came from. I've tried to observe every angle available in this place, from my back around to my back again, but still nothing, I was alone in this place.

“Please Mr ———, sit, and I'll explain everything.”

I turned myself around abruptly, this time because I was definitely sure that that voice was coming from my back. Both of my eyes dilated as I found a black silhouette of a man standing behind the desk. His whole figure was shrouded in darkness, making me unable to recognize any feature of his body. But from his silhouette, the only thing I could notice is that he was about 170 centimetres tall and was wearing a doctor's coat.

[Wait, what did he just call me?]

He just said only three lines and obviously he just called my name, I remembered everything he just said, but no matter how I recalled everything he said in my mind, I could not repeat the part where he called my name.

“I understand that you are willing to participate in our program—”

“What did you just call me?!”

I furious barged and walked around the desk toward him, but when I reached my hands to his collar about to grab his figure, my hands just went through his figure, as if I was trying to catch a ghost. His figure also disappeared when my fingers touched his silhouette, making me frantically turning around looking for him. But despite his figure gone, his voice could still be heard continuing his

sentence behind my back.

“...and I thank you for your consent. Believe me when I say that you will do great deeds should you succeed.”

As I turned myself around, I found the logic of this place had been bent. The desk I walked around should have been at least four steps away from me, but instead I found it standing right in front of me. Terrified, I took a step back. But the back of my thigh bumps against something hard and deprived me of my balance. I braced my bottom to land on something solid, but instead, my fall halted mid-way on something else; a rotating chair.

I literally dropped my jaw. I started gasping, not just through my nose, but also through my mouth. Soon I remembered that I had to calm myself, start with stopping to breathe orally and closed my lips. The sudden change on my breathing pattern forced me to swallow some of my saliva, which ironically almost made me choke. But it actually helped, I had calmed a little.

But still I hadn't yet to understand what was really happening here. Even I began to doubt if I was really still alive. Since everything, from this 'room,' this chair, the desk, the sensation of grabbing a ghost I felt when I was about to grab that figure, the feeling of almost got choked by my own spittle, and the sensation I felt when I fell to this chair, all of those were too damn real for a dream.

“From this moment on, you'll be living in this facility. You will get everything you want, but we expect you to always be prepared any time we need you.”

Despite I had several questions about what he just said, like what did he call me, what he meant with 'program,' or who is he, I had given up on asking. The only thing I wanted now was to get out of this place.

“Every once and then, I will monitor your condition personally. There is no actual schedule for that, I will do it sporadically—”

“Shut up! Just get me out of here!”

I screamed as loud as I could, but he did not react. Even I realised that my loud voice didn't even echo, as if this 'room' I was in was boundless, literally infinite.

“...and that's all you need to know for now. Someone will show you your quarter. If you ever need anything, just let us know.”

I couldn't hold my impatience anymore, not if I was going to be confined in this room forever. I wanted to scream, loud enough that my lungs would break. I stood from the chair where I sit and slammed both of my hands onto the wooden desk in front of me.

“You deaf fuck! All I want is to get—”

Just in an instant, I could feel something, I can differ what is real and what is not. It felt just like when someone has kidnapped me, put a blindfold over my eyes, taken me on a plane, opened my blindfold, and then threw me out from that plane.

“—OUT!!!”

I woke up from my sleep while still continuing what I did last in my dream; screaming on top of my lungs. My voice was so loud, that was the only thing I could hear until ten seconds later. That kind of sudden shift in my conscience made me slightly confused, but only for a brief moment before I could adapt to my new surroundings.

Immediately after I stopped screaming, my senses began to recover. First thing I did was to apprehend what had happened, I needed to know where I was. Currently, I was sitting on a bed in a white room where there was only one bed, which I sat on. There were also a desk with a chair, a mirror, a jacket hanging next to it, and a medical kit cabinet.

After a few seconds, I could feel my head was dizzy. I realised that this room was a part of a ship. Not too long after that, I began to hear rushing footsteps from outside the room. The room did not had any door, only a rectangular hole in the wall with a door frame covered by a cloth as its curtain.

As the footsteps outside got louder, my instinct began to react. I scanned the room for weapon to defend myself since I didn't exactly know where I was now. But I couldn't find anything useful.

FLUSH

A sudden voice of flapping fabric diverted my focus, from looking for a

weapon towards the entrance which covered in cloth. There stood two sturdy-looking man who fixed their eyes on me for a moment.

“HE'S AWAK—”

One of the men shouted. Yet before he finished, I managed to silence him by throwing a pillow to his face. To my surprise, my throw was strong enough to knock him back off the doorway. The other man immediately ran toward me while looking violent. I could read his movement, he was trying to pin me onto the bed where I was sitting.

Before he could reach me, I jumped at him and landed my right foot to his left shoulder. I used the direction of my fall and my weight to bring his whole body down. My body was not heavy enough to actually pin him on the floor, but I still had enough force to kick him back using my right foot still on his left shoulder.

His back collided against the wall and the medicine cabinet, some of its content pouring to the floor. Some of the medicines got scattered all over the floor as their glass bottles shattered from crashing the floor. Meanwhile the plastic bottles withstood the fall with only pouring out their contents as the fall broke open their lids.

Among the cluttering pills, I noticed a pair of small scissors which also fell out from inside the medicine cabinet. Realising my opponent was still struggling to rise up from my recent attack, I seized the chance to pick the scissors with my right hand.

Right after I grabbed the scissors, the man thrust his right shoulder at me while his left hand caught my right wrist. The force of his attack pushed me backward, strong enough to land my back against the bed. He had my upper body pinned against the bed and his grip upon my wrist so tight that it forced me to let my grip on the scissors go. Even my free left hand was not strong enough to push his face away.

Suddenly I realised that my legs were still free. Didn't took me long to pull my legs towards his abdomen and then push him with all my might. He stepped aback trying to regain balance. Yet the pills on the floor undermined his effort. He tripped and fell to the floor with the back of his headfirst against the wall.

He groaned in pain. I guessed the fall must have made his head dizzy, the sound of his head crashing against the wall was loud enough to distract me that I realised that outside there was stampeding sound of footsteps approaching. Immediately I shifted my eyes toward the scissors in my right. I turned around and grab them with my left hand since my right hand was still hurt.

At the corner of my eyes, I noticed four men were standing by the doorway, looking at me amazed after they found the man I knocked down lying against the wall. I tightened my grip to the scissors in my left hand while sorting my breath. My left foot hovering slowly onto the floor, trying to find a solid surface while my right still sitting on the bed along with the rest of my body, preparing to charge towards them.

“Quick! Hold him!”

Suddenly, a voice commanded from outside. The voice had all of us distracted, but it also gave me the chance to attack first. I thrust myself forward while holding the scissors and ran towards them. There was only small chance that I could win against four people, but taking advantage of their distraction, I might be able to take one of them as my hostage.

It should only take me three steps until I reach the one who stood at the front, but my first step alerted them all. The man in the front managed to avoid my first attack with the scissors, but he didn't do anything after. Instead another man proceeded to grab my left wrist and another man tackled my chest. Both of them pushed me backwards towards the bed.

After the two had me pinned down, the other two joined them, making it harder for me to break free. The man holding my left wrist bit my hand, making me screams in pain and forced me to open my grip. I didn't know what he did next with the scissors, I couldn't see him. I kept expecting the worst, but four of them just kept restraining my movement without doing anything that would damage me fatally.

Among the chaos, I noticed someone else had entered the room. He walked hastily toward me, trying to face me without having his men letting their restrain off me. It would seem he was their leader, someone who was responsible for my condition right now.

Using all the power left in my body, I raised my body trying to stand. To my surprise, I was strong enough to resist against them. Although barely, I was finally able to face him, there stood a man wearing green sweater, slowly taking steps aback to make his distance from me. The four men were restraining me with all their might, one pulling my left arm, one pulling my right, and two other locking my neck, but their effort was rendered useless. I was stronger alone than four of them.

“It's okay, don't panic...”

The other man in front of me slowly approached, he lifted his right hand toward my forehead. Then I could feel a damp sensation on my moustache area, some liquid dropped from my nostrils into the grinding teeth inside my opened mouth, from which I could tell a distinct taste of salt.

“Calm down! You're bleeding!” the man ordered loudly. Even without his order, I slowly lost strength, I began to feel weak, not even strong enough to stand. Also slowly, the grips of the four men were loosening. But without their support, I couldn't even stand on my own.

As I was losing my balance, the man in front of me caught me. His slightly taller figure than me forced me to look above so I could look him in the eyes.

“What's happening? Where am I? What—”

Weakly I queried a barrage of question, as I was unsure how long I could maintain my consciousness. I just wished he'd at least answer one of my questions.

“Relax, I know you have so many questions.”

“Just answer— Wait... who... am I...?”

“Rest...” his voice is keeps fading away as I lose my awareness, “we will talk later.”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

Again, I fell into a dreamless rest, but I was still too restless to have this rest. The next thing I knew, I was back in that room; a room with only one chair and

one desk. I raised my hands onto the desk, once and twice I tried to clap them. The sensation and the sound they produced, they felt so real. Yet I was sure that this place was not real at all.

“What is this place?”

Another question, as if there was not enough matter to confuse me at the moment. The solitude of this place gave me peace to reflect on myself, I tried to answer the entire questions myself, but I didn't have the facts I needed to arrange the facts.

“What happened to me?” That was the first question, “what is the reason I ended up here?”

The last thing, and ironically also the first thing I could remember was waking up staring at stormy sky while floating on the ocean.

“But what happened to me that I ended up there? Fuck! I can't remember anything!”

I covered the top of my head with both of my hands and furiously scratched it. I hated myself for knowing absolutely nothing.

“Who am I?” I asked myself. “What did I do to deserve all this?!”

“Good day, Mr. ———.”

“What?”

It was happening again, I was not alone here. Someone or something was communicating with me. Not just that, he also called my name but I was still unable to hear my own name.

“Who's there?!”

I looked around, at least waiting for another voice. Just let me believe that I was not insane.

“Who's there?”

Another voice, but I didn't like this. I knew exactly that voice, that harsh voice of mine.

Did my voice echoed? That voice was definitely mine, my voice talking to the

other voice. I had no recollection of it anywhere, yet I felt like I knew what I will have to say. Was I the one in control of this room? Or instead, this room controls me?

“I'm the one in charge of this project.”

Suddenly another black silhouette of man appeared from my right. He walks around me to the other side of the desk until I can see his full figure. He is completely different from the one I meet in my previous visit to this room. This one is slightly taller, at least 180 centimetres, he is also wearing a suit and his hair is neatly combed aback.

“Then you must be Doctor Einhorn...”

“Then you must be Doctor Einhorn.”

I correctly guessed what ethereal my voice had to say. Finally I realised that this was not something that was happening to me, instead something that had happened to me. This room was a place from my memories. But no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't remember anything about this Doctor Einhorn, what he called me, nor what happened in this room.

The silhouette approached me who was sitting on the chair and offered me a handshake, doubtfully I raised my hand to answer his gesture. And to my surprise, I could feel a solid texture of a hand as I shook his hand. The sensation was definite meat, flesh and muscle. His grip was firm, yet so gentle, like handshaking with a living stone statue, only far more alive.

“How are your progresses?”

“I'm still struggling with the basics, what do you expect me to accomplish?”

When he spoke, I already knew the respond. But at the same time, I also felt like I had never been here before. It felt like re-experiencing a past you never knew about. Despite being the one who was experiencing this, I could only watch like a bystander.

“I believe my subordinate had briefed you.”

“Yes, but not in details.”

“Okay, what do you want to know?”

“Can you start from the very beginning?”

“Well, I'm not sure how...”

He pondered for a moment, might be thinking about what he should say next.

“...do you like this world?”

“Excuse me?”

“How the world is governed by the olds and frails who manipulate the young and toughs to protect what they have and to get what they don't have nor deserve?”

“ ... ”

For a moment, my voice went silent, even if I had experienced this, I didn't know how I would respond to that kind of question.

“I'm not sure, but I don't think I'd like it.”

“You should be. In my early days, I've killed one to many human souls before I understood their value, not to me, but to those who cared for them.”

“You were a soldier?”

“Yeah, my past is something that I can't replace with good deeds.”

“ ... ”

“I never liked it, and I don't want anyone else to feel the same.”

“That's why you choose to do something about it?”

“Yeah, and you are the key to that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know time travel, right?”

“Yeah, what does that have something to do with me?”

“Two years ago, I witnessed an important event which is probably the most influential event of my life.”

“What event?”

“It's a long story, but enough to make me say that I might have found a way to

change the whole world.”

“Okay, but what does everything I am doing have something to do with... time travel?”

Without context, I was unable to understand a single thing they're talking. What does Doctor Einhorn and I have to do with time travel? What happened between us? I was beginning to see the importance of Doctor Einhorn for me. At least enough to believe that if I wanted to know about what happened to me, I should search for him.

“To be honest, I can't say anything for the moment since I am not yet sure that I am absolutely right.”

“And, what will happen if you're wrong?”

“...” he went silent for a moment, with his hollow face looking at me deeply. It was odd, despite him being only a silhouette, I could feel something inside his faceless gaze, some kind of sympathy, as if I deeply believed in him. “That choice is yours to decide and to fight for, I can only guide you through the way, the way I'm not sure exist.”

“Doctor Einhorn?”

Suddenly another voice could be heard interrupting, it took Doctor Einhorn's attention away from me. He turned around and faces my right, looking blankly at nothing, as if he was talking through his eyes. After a few moment, he nodded and turned his face back at me.

“It would seem this concludes our session for today, we will continue this later.”

He proceeded to walk around to my back through my right, I fixed my eyes at him, tracing his movements to find him fading away as he reached the backside of my chair.

I was left here alone, left to do nothing. His conference with ethereal me didn't help me. Instead it left me with even more questions to answer. I covered my face with both of my hands and rested my elbows on my knees, closing my eyes tightly while wishing when I open my eyes, everything would have been just a nightmare.

“Hey, ——!”

Another ethereal voice can be heard, but the voice is different from any voice I've heard. The voice was so soft, calming, and soothing. It was calling my name, but my ill perception for sound was preventing me from hearing my own name. That voice also felt so familiar, so familiar it forced me to turnaround looking for its source.

After turning around more than half a circle to my right, a little far from the chair, I could see a white figure standing and waving its hand at me. Its perpetual motion seemed like asking me to approach it. I raised myself from the chair. Still clearing my doubt, I slowly approached the white figure in afar.

“Come on!”

Its movement broke, it stopped waving its hand sideways and begins to waving its hand back and forth. Slowly, I began to notice that the white figure was a girl.

The closer I got, the white figure's shape began to form a noticeable silhouette, just like Doctor Einhorn's black silhouette figure, just in different colour. Her hip long hair swayed as her hand moved, she wore a one piece dress as long as her knees and a wide brimmed straw hat.

“Hurry up!”

When I was about at least fifteen steps away from her, she lowered her hand and began to run away from me. As she made a distance between me and her, I could hear playful giggles, as if she wanted me to catch her.

“Wait!”

She had made enough distance before I started chasing her. She didn't run fast, didn't take much effort for me to catch her. But when I touched her figure, her body broke to hundreds of ravens flapping their wings to fly upward and disappeared to the air. This surprise had me covering my face by crossing my arms. But oddly, her playful giggles didn't disappear. I could still hear it from somewhere. I turned my face left and right and backwards to find her again.

“Hey, ——!”

I could hear her again. But instead of approaching her, I turned myself and tried to ignore her. But wherever I turned, I could still see her in afar in front of my eyes.

“ENOUGH!”

I unleashed my rage by shouting on top of my lungs. But what followed was this place's sky and ground began to swap. The black ground shifted forward while the grey sky shifted backward until the black ground ended in where the grey sky was and the grey skies ended in the place where the black ground formerly occupied. After which, the white figure stopped giggling and calling me.

The sudden change of this place made me terrified. Again I wanted to get out. For at least four times, I turned around looking for the desk and chair or—better yet—the exit without finding anything. Until suddenly I saw the same white figure again. But now she was hanging from the black ground ceiling, staring its hollow face at me blankly.

“You're la~te!”

“Huh?”

She touched my forehead using her right index finger, her touch made me flinch and close both of my eyes. Her touch made this whole place collapse, the sensation of her touch soon be swept by the explosion of gushing wind all around me. I didn't know what happened. The next thing I knew, I went unconscious. I fell into dreamless slumber, the time revolved, the world rotated, all without me.

There was absolutely no way for me to know how long time had passed. My mind literally turned off for the moment, sleeping so deep in a dreamless rest felt so peaceful. These moments of tranquillity I was enjoying soon to be disturbed by a feeling of falling. My body suddenly felt heavy, as if I was thrown from heights so high onto the ground. But I was unable to enjoy the drop nor the fall, I just felt the spontaneous jolt which woke my corporeal body.

“Agh!”

I woke up in the same room where I remembered having a clash with seven

people. Despite still having to adjust my breath, this time I woke up peacefully, no sudden need to assess my surroundings nor the need to protect myself. This kind of serenity gave me the chance to understand the situation.

I realised that I was resting in an infirmary of a small ship. Unlike the last time, I slowly got off the bed and slowly traced my way toward the doorway, covered by a cloth. From there I could see small corridors which only led one-way, and this infirmary I was in was right in the end of the corridor.

I pressed my left hand on the left side of the wall to withstand the dizziness from this ship's wobbling. The corridor's wall was made from polished fiberglass while the floor was made of metal. My bare feet felt cold from touching the metal surface. As well as my left hand, just not as cold as my feet.

As I walk, my sight got disrupted by glitching ghostly yellow figures wearing lab coats. Their presence also produced some kind of ambient noise, like the sound of chattering crowd. Not too long after their appearance, I could feel a damp sensation on my upper lip. I tried rubbing on, indeed there was something liquid dripping from my nostrils. I lowered my eyes to see that my fingers were drenched in blood. Despite still worrying over my own condition, after I put my hand down, the sight and sound of ghostly yellow figures had disappeared.

In the end of the corridor, beamed a square light brightly. As I wiped my bloody upper lip, I raised my right hand to cover my eyes as I approached the light. The flashing light behind the end of the corridor was enough to blind me. I ascended the small set of stairs which led to the upper deck. Upon reaching the deck, my eyes began to slowly adjusting to the blinding sunshine, and I could have sworn that this was the first sunshine and blue sky I had seen in forever. As my eyes were gradually adapting, I began to understand that this ship was a fishing vessel.

On the upper deck, I noticed four people were lounging around. The first one was sitting on the port side of the deck, he was the sturdy looking man I knocked out back in the infirmary. The second one was looking at the seas from the port side, slightly farther than the first man, he was slightly smaller than the first one. His distinctive feature was the black cap with red front brim he was wearing. The next one was standing near the starboard, talking with the fourth. The third one was wearing short pants and the last one white stripped orange

shirt. The one wearing cap and the one wearing short pants noticed my presence, they alerted the other two and then the one in short pants proceeded to enter a door on the deck, right to the doorway to the lower deck.

“You okay?”

The one I beat up back then approached me, offering me a handshake. I looked at his hand hesitantly and reluctantly responded his gesture. Unlike last time, he turned out to be friendly enough. Might be my fault though.

“I'm Mory, you should talk to the doctor.”

“Doctor?”

My first thought is the name "Einhorn," but I know it wouldn't be this easy. Plus I knew that whatever happened to me must have separated me and Einhorn.

“Yeah, Tim is calling him,” he averted from my eyes and pointed at the door where the one wearing short pants entered earlier. “Ah, there they are.”

As he finished speaking, he immediately returned to the place where he was sitting. From behind that door, two figures appeared. The first one was wearing short pants. And the second one was, if I recall correctly, the last figure that I saw before I lost my consciousness the last time.

“Doctor?”

“Yes, my name is Jordan. Are you feeling well enough?”

His confirmation of his identity disappointed me. I was slightly hoping that the doctor they were calling was Einhorn. Although even as he came out of that door, I almost immediately accepted that his appearance and voice was completely different from the black silhouette I met when I was unconscious.

“Yes, do you know what happened to me?”

“Frankly, I'm not so sure.”

[Great, just someone who doesn't know anything.]

“I was hoping *you* could tell me. We should talk in the infirmary.”

He pointed his right palm back toward the lower deck corridor; the place I was

coming from. He walked before me and led the way back to the infirmary.

“So, what happened to me?” I asked.

“Like I said, I'm not sure,” he answered. “What was the last thing you remember?”

“...I was floating on the ocean, at night...”

“I mean about you.”

“...”

Again, I tried to remember anything I could about myself. But my mind hid my memory too well, I couldn't remember anything at all, not even glimpses. As if I was born yesterday.

“I'm sorry, I can't.”

“I see...” he commented briefly, a hint of disappointment could be heard in his voice.

After our small chitchat, we had reached the infirmary. Jordan waved the cloth covering the doorway and entered the room. Soon I followed him inside and stop, awaiting his side of the story.

“Wait, how long had I passed out?”

“About fourteen hours, before that you passed out for five hours.”

“Before I woke up and clashed with your crew?”

“Haha, yeah,” he laughed sincerely. “You know, Mory is the strongest in this ship, and you won against him.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, you even managed to escape from four men's restraining.”

“...” in retrospect, I highly doubt it. “I don't know how I did that, I'm not even sure if I can move that chair.”

“Probably you had adrenaline surge, or something like that.”

That might be the cause, I knew I was ferocious that time.

“When we found you, you were wearing this.”

Jordan took the jacket hanging on the wall next to the mirror and gave it to me. The jacket was very thick, decorated with fur on its collar. Just like what they wore in winter. I immediately searched its four pockets for any clue, first the right and left hip pockets, then the right and left chest pockets, but nothing. The only thing that caught my attention was a name tag above the left chest pocket.

[*Theodore Quentin.*]

“Is that your name?”

Jordan noticed that I was focusing on the name tag, my brain turned to aggressive trying to remember this name. I pushed myself trying to remember, so forceful my head began to hurt. I pressed my right hand against my left eye to suppress the pain, but despite my effort and the pain, I couldn't remember anything.

“I... can't remember...”

“It's okay, you don't have to force yourself.”

Jordan took the jacket away from me and helped me sit on the bed, maybe in case should I collapsed suddenly. Despite I didn't like being treated like this, I couldn't help to accept his courtesy.

“What is happening with me? Why can't I remember anything?”

“...”

Jordan stared at me, his eyes were filled with curiosity, I could tell that he was also asking the same questions.

“My guess is, you are suffering from severe amnesia, your long term memory has been locked, I don't know the details since I am not a neurologist.”

“Ugh...”

I pressed my right hand against my left eye harder to suppress the sudden sharp pain inside my head, this feeling came with sudden presence of glitching ghostly figures, but instead the earlier one, this time the figures were colourful ghosts of children. Running and playing all over the room while laughing playfully.

“What's wrong?”

Jordan exclaimed as I suddenly removed my right hand from his shoulder and pressed it to my face. He used both of his hands to hold my shoulders and lead me towards the bed.

“Can you see that?” I asked him while pointing towards the ghostly figures children inside this room.

“See what?”

It would seem that he could not see them, those ghostly figures were only visible to me.

“Never mind.”

Those figures gradually disappeared one by one. As each one of them disappeared, the sharp pain in my head also slowly faded away.

“If I don't have anything that could reveal my identity, then I don't mind being called Theodore Quentin.”

“ ... ”

He went silent for a moment, staring at me intently. This time I could feel that his eyes were judging me.

“I've checked your name last night, you're being searched after your helicopter fell.”

“Helicopter?”

“It would seem that while you were escorting for some kind of private corporation, some accident happened, you might have hurt and got amnesia.”

“I see,” I remarked. “Where was I going?”

“India.”

“Then that is where I should go.”

“In two days, we are returning to Mombasa. They have arranged a rescue party to pick you up on the pier.”

“Thanks.”

“It's okay.”

“Is there something I can help you?”

I was glad at least I could hear some good news. Without Jordan and his crew, I'd probably died on the sea. I didn't know how I could express my gratitude, this was the least I could do for him.

“No, it's okay.”

“I insist.”

Really, I had this feeling of responsibility to fulfill. I took the liberty to walk off the infirmary toward the deck, looking for something I could do. Also since my last headache, I was pretty sure of my condition. The only dizziness I could feel right now was from the constant wobbling of this ship.

“You should rest. I haven't checked your condition thoroughly.”

“Don't worry about it, I'm fine now. Beside you've seen what I'm capable of right? I did beat your friend.”

As I hastily walked through the corridor, again the sunlight blinded my sight. I wanted to do something because I'd like to see the open skies which I would be unable to do from that windowless infirmary.

When I reached the deck, one of the ship's crew had left, leaving only three men on deck, the sturdy looking man with tight shirt, the man wearing short pants, and the man wearing white stripped orange shirt.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, I'm a lot better now.”

The one wearing short pants noticed our presence, he approached us who from his side would have seen having a cooling argument.

“Jordan, what's up?”

“Oh, Tim. You haven't properly met him, right?”

“No?”

“All right, Theodore, this is Tim. Tim, he is Theodore.”

Jordan introduced me to him, I thought I remembered him back when I was rampaging in the infirmary.

“Hi, sorry about then.”

“It's okay. You know, you seem to be stronger than Mory if you were able to fight a four men restraining.”

Jordan shook his head a little, asking Tim to have a private conversation with him. I understood and I stepped a few steps back, letting them having some privacy.

From this distance, I saw that Jordan was trying to explain something while whispering, and Tim seemed to be disagreeing with him while also whispering. Seeing them having disagreement had me wished that they were not talking about me.

Finally they seemed to have reached agreement. After they finished talking, Jordan approached me again while Tim returning to his friends and informed them of something.

“Sorry, we had to sort something.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

“No, not you...” Jordan pauses for a moment. “I think you've already known, this ship is a fishing ship.”

“I see...”

“We lost someone in the last storm, even with eight people on board, we barely survived that storm.”

As Jordan spoke, Tim gathered the other ship's crew around me, including a man wearing blue shirt under white unbuttoned white shirt who just exited a room in the right side of the deck.

“According to today's broadcast, there is a storm we have to pass if we want to reach Mombasa.”

“Yeah, we'd need more hands on deck too.”

The man in unbuttoned shirt joined the conversation, despite not facing me

directly, but instead he stared into the far horizon, where grey clouds have seems gathering.

“We'll need your help to get through that storm,” he continues, while averting from his glance towards me.

“I will help.”

“We'll need to reach the storm before night, before the tide pushes us away from land.”

“By the way, you haven't known every one of us, right?” Jordan cut in again. “We haven't properly introduced each other.”

The man wearing unbuttoned shirt raises his right hand, offering me a handshake. He was only slightly taller then, about one hand above me. He hovered his right hand one step away over my stomach, with a little doubt, I answered his hanging hand and he firmly grasped on my right hand.

“I'm Dasan, captain of this ship.”

“Theodore Quentin...”

Before I even release my hand, other's hand has been waiting for me. Immediately I move my hand to the other's. First one I shake is the hand of the man wearing short pants.

“Tim.”

Under two seconds, he let my hand go, it's a definite hint that I need to move towards the other's. Next one I shake is the hand of the sturdy looking man in tight brown shirt.

“Mory.”

His grip is so tight, I can't help but to let go first. I can see satisfaction in his face, must be because he had his payback when I knocked him outback then. The next one I shake is the man wearing white stripped orange shirt. Among all the people here, I believe he has the friendliest face.

“Alvi.”

This one's grip is the weakest so far, despite his limp fish grip, also he doesn't

let my hand go until I release my hand. And the last one, is the youngest. When my right hand is hovering in front of him, he offers me a high five instead. His right palm remains hanging a few spans of hands in front of my face. Despite a bit awkward, answer his gesture ineptly.

“Peppy!”

Well, that's all of them. I look at every one of them without saying anything, blending in a warm environment like this somewhat make me uneasy.

“Actually, there were an eighth crew. But unfortunately he passed away in the last storm.”

Jordan points to the lower deck, there must be a room where they keep the eighth crew. I try to look in the direction he pointed, and judging from that, I believe the eighth crew must be kept in the room beside the infirmary.

“His name was Ben,” Dasan, the captain, adds. “We have four hours before the sun sets and the tide rises. We have to reach the storm in that time so we can ride the waves.”

“I agree with Dasan,” Tim says, concurring to what Dasan said.

I could see the intention. From midday to midnight, the ocean waves always flow toward the coast. It will be easier to ride on the storm to reach the land. Once we entered the storm, we will only have to balance ourselves against the waves.

“Yeah, we don't have time. Our cargo won't stay fresh for another day,” Peppy added, while pointing toward a square hole in the bow side of the deck.

Howls of agreement suddenly roared among the crews. They were all in agreement. They all also had the same expression; anxiety and hesitation. From their faces, it was clear that they feared to share the fate of their fallen friend. On the other hand, they had to overcome their trauma if they want to survive.

“Excuse me...” I interrupted while raising my left hand requesting their attention. I waited until every one stopped their muttering before I informed them of my thought. “I think that all of you are afraid, after seeing what happened to your friend.”

“ ... ”

“I'm not your friend, but I'll work as hard as he did if not more.”

The vacant look on their faces told me that I was right,. I was literally nobody to them, but they had saved me. Now it was my turn to repay their deed.

“If we keep this up, we are not going to get through that storm. We need to have faith and courage. I'll try my best, and I need you to as well.”

“Well said,’ Dasan replied on my brief speech. “He's right, we can't keep brood in sorrow for Ben. We keep calling it sympathy. But really we simply are scared of ending up the same way.”

As Dasan spoke, I could see their faces began to rise and filled with determination.

“Thanks, we needed to hear that,” Jordan added, then smiled before entering the door in the right side of the deck.

Mory, Alvi, Peppy, and Tim patted my shoulder before they scattered to their own stations. Alvi and Peppy entered the lower deck, while Mory and Tim stood on the starboard and port side of the deck. Dasan stayed with me.

“Ben works on the sails with Mory and Tim. They could use your help.”

“I will help them.”

Dasan and I parted ways. I headed for Tim in the starboard on the deck while Dasan went for the door on the same side, where Jordan entered earlier.

“Hi,” I greeted Tim whose eyes were fixed on the brewing storm in the horizon.

“ ... ”

He only took a quick glance at me before averting his eyes back onto the horizon. It would seem that he was still preparing himself before entering the storm.

“Dasan told me to help you, is there something I can do?”

“You know how to tie knots?”

“I... do.”

[Wait, something was wrong. How did I know how to do that? I could even remember what happened to me two days ago, yet I knew how to tie a knot?]

“Then you should be fine.”

After a few moments, the ship began to move forward. Gushing breezes with splashes of salty water touched my face as the ship moved. As we approached the storm, the skies were getting darker and the cat's skin breeze turned into a gale.

“Everyone's in position?!” Dasan yelled from the bridge on the second story of the deck, along with Jordan in the same room.

“Get the line, now!” Tim shouted at me as he sees Mory had begun climbing the mast.

I hastily grabbed two rolls of rope which lied under the mast and threw one at Tim. After receiving the rope, Tim threw something at me which I awkwardly caught with my both hands. I looked at my hands and saw a pocket knife in them. Well, if I were to work with ropes, it makes sense to hang on a knife.

“When Mory cut the sail, quickly roll it!”

I nodded to Tim's instruction then shifted my eyes towards the top of the mast and tucked my pocket knife to the right back pocket of my pants as I waited for Mory to finish cutting the sail. As I looked at him, drops of water had begun to fall from the dark skies onto my face.

“Two storms in one week...” Tim scoffed at me, which I responded with an awkward smile.

“Done!”

Mory yelled from the top of the mast, dropping a layer of thick fabric to us. Without hesitation, Tim grabbed it before it even touched the deck and rolled one side of it.

“What are you waiting for?! Get on to it!”

Tim shouted at me for being slow, the roll of sail was leaning to his side. Knowing that he was waiting for me to react, I abruptly joined him rolling the other side of the sail. Soon as the roll was square, Tim continued his rolling in a

pace I was almost unable to catch.

It didn't take much time to roll the seven meters tall sail with that speed. Tim climbed onto the guard rail to lift the roll of sail and tied it onto the boom. He pointed his finger towards the mast, hinting that I should climb onto the mast and do the same.

Meanwhile Mory has climbed down and ready to help us, I'm the only one between them who stalls since I don't know what I should do.

“Get up there and tie the sail!”

Mory instructed me to climb onto the boom, I complied without saying anything. He grabbed the sail roll as I climbed and as Tim waiting on the other end of the branch.

Mory lifted the sail to my side first, he held it on its place while waiting for me to tie the sail onto the boom. The rain which showered us had now turned into downpour. The raindrops had made our clothes from damp to wet in minutes. Mory kept raking his hair backward every time his hair fell down his face because of the water. Fortunately my hair was short, so Mory's problem was not mine.

I wrapped the sail at least ten times before I secured it with a knot and tested that it was fixed in its place. I gave a signal to Mory that I was done here so he lifted the other sail's end. It's true though, Mory was stronger than me. I tried to lift the sail earlier and I couldn't do it, and to see Mory able to do it alone proved it.

“Tim! You need help?!” I shouted at Tim who noticeably having a hard time tying the sail.

“No, stay there!”

The strong wind around us pushed Tim around. He was having a difficulties between hanging on, keeping his balance, and tying the sail. Despite his conditions, he rejected my offer for help. Knowing that Tim needed me where I was, Mory proceeded to help him instead while I continued securing the sail.

“Ugh!”

“What happened?!”

I heard a groaning noise from the other end of the boom, there I found Tim was sucking the valley between the index and thumb finger of his left hand. I took it he accidentally cut his hand as he about to close the tie.

“You okay?!” Mory asks.

“I dropped my knife!”

I was right, he accidentally cut his hand and dropped his knife off the ship, I could see that he hadn't finished securing the sail yet. I hastened my pace to finish this tie so I could help Tim and Mory.

“Wait! I'll be there!” I shouted at Tim and Mory who didn't have any difficulties hanging on. Yet from the looks on their faces, I knew they wanted me to hurry. “Done!”

I jumped off from the mast onto the deck and run towards Tim and Mory. But when I landed, the ship was crashing against a big wave. The turbulence was enough to throw me, Tim, and Mory off balance. As I raised myself up, I could see that Mory was helping Tim to stand up.

I held the knife's edge and pointed the handle to Tim. He shook his head after seeing me handing him the knife, hinting that he was not in condition. I could see blood was dripping from his lips, despite him desperately sucking the blood, enough to say that his wound was pretty deep.

“I'll check the engine room, I think I can help there!” Tim said still biting his left hand as he kept his balance from toppling while he walked himself towards the lower deck. “I'll ask Alvi or Peppy to help you here!”

“No, just help them down there!”

The only option was me to finish his work. I've seen Alvi and Peppy, they were not suitable for deck works. That was why I refused Tim's offer while still focusing myself to tie the knots.

“Yeah, you just help them!” Mory adds, agreeing with me.

Also it was unnecessary, soon as Tim entered the lower deck, I finished tying the knots. I shook the sail a few times to make sure that it was firmly secured.

“Done?!” Mory asked.

“Yeah!”

“We're done here! Let's wait in the bridge!” he continued, expressing his thought which I was not differing with.

After I put the knife to my pants' back pocket, I looked at the skies for a moment, I vaguely remembered this scene. The grey and black chiaroscuro I pondered under when I was having a difficult time telling what was real and what not. This time I knew exactly that this was real.

“What are you doing?!”

Mory shouted from the door leading towards the bridge, his shout was indistinct as it's trying to fight against the storm's song. But his vague voice was enough to attract my attention.

“I'm coming—”

“Help!”

Suddenly a startling scream could be heard approaching from the lower deck, it's not Tim's voice, but I was sure that it was Peppy's panicking voice.

“What happened?!” I asked him who was rushing out from the lower deck.

“The engine! It's overheating!”

“What?!”

“The engine's overheating!”

“What do you need me to do?!”

“We need to cool it off, I'll try with pouring water on it!”

“Okay, then. I'll tell Dasan the situation!”

Peppy and I dispersed without saying anything, I soon headed to the door in the right side of the deck.

“Dasan! The engine is overheating!” I screamed through the door without entering the room, I knew my voice is loud enough for them to hear.

“Dammit! Turn it off then!”

That should go without saying, I slammed the door and ran towards the engine room in the lower decks. But before I could enter, I stopped just right before Alvi about to clash with me, in his hands were four buckets.

“There you are! Can you fill these buckets?!” He asked me.

“Right, and Dasan wants you to turn the engine off!”

“Okay!”

He handed me all the four buckets in his hand to me, which I immediately put down to catch some of the rain waters. It didn't take long to fill, I poured all the contents of other three buckets to one to make it full and put the other three back on their places. I carried the full bucket into the lower deck and headed for the engine room.

“Water!”

“Pour it to the engine!”

Without hesitation I followed Alvi's instruction, I took my stance to splash the engine with the water. With one swing I emptied the bucket and all the content collided with the hot engine. A lot of steam spread all around the engine room, which meant that the engine was still heating.

“I'll get more water!”

I rushed myself towards the lower deck corridor and without stopping ran towards the upper deck. I found all the buckets I put down had almost filled to its full. I put down the empty bucket I was carrying and took two buckets, one in each of my hands.

“Tidal wave!”

“Huh?!”

I could hear someone yelling from the bridge, I raised my face upwards, despite it felt hurt when the rapid raindrops landed on my face. From here I saw Jordan under a window of the bridge.

“A tidal wave is approaching from port! Turn the engine back on!”

“It's still heating!”

“Just do it! Or we will get capsized!”

Again, I rushed myself into the lower decks, run with two buckets of water across the corridors towards its end and turn left, across the infirmary.

“Turn the engine back on!”

I shouted as I barged into the engine room. Tim, Alvi and Peppy looks at me with discontent, perhaps questioning my statement. While they busy staring at me, I had already preparing myself to splash the water onto the engine.

“It's still heating!”, Alvi exclaimed, with his palms pointing towards the steaming engine.

“I know, but there is a tidal wave! We need to turn!”

“The engine will bust!”

“Every second we keep arguing, the tidal wave is closing in and nothing we can do about it except to turn!” I shouted while putting the bucket in my right hand down and preparing to pour the other one.

“Dammit! Turn it back on!”

Alvi finally gave in and instructed Tim and Peppy to turn the engine back on despite the engine still steaming. While all of them were trying to turn the engine on, I was still emptying the second bucket. Peppy wrapped a cable onto the generator and pulled it with his might a few times before finally the engine turned on, and at the same time I have poured the second bucket empty.

“I'll get more water and tell Dasan that the engine is on!”

I grabbed the buckets and ran toward the deck again and checked the other two buckets. I replaced the buckets on the deck with the ones I carry.

“The engine's back on!” I shouted towards the open window of the bridge.

“Brace for impact!”

Jordan warned me, and accidentally I caught a glimpse from the corner of my eyes. From the port side of the ship, there was an at least ten metres tall of tidal wave, which I thought was the sky at first. With this sight in front of me, I dropped both of the buckets in my hands and dropped my jaw also.

[Too late for a turn!]

Soon as I regained my alertness again, I ran towards the guardrail on the port side and grabbed it. I wished I could have at least told the other three in the engine room. Also, as I tightly held on to the guardrail, I noticed that my nose was bleeding again. This was not the best time for this.

“Promise me, ———. You will show me the sea.”

“What?”

I heard something, someone whispered. That's impossible. Even when someone shouted here, I could barely hear them. Yet I could hear this whispering voice crystal clear.

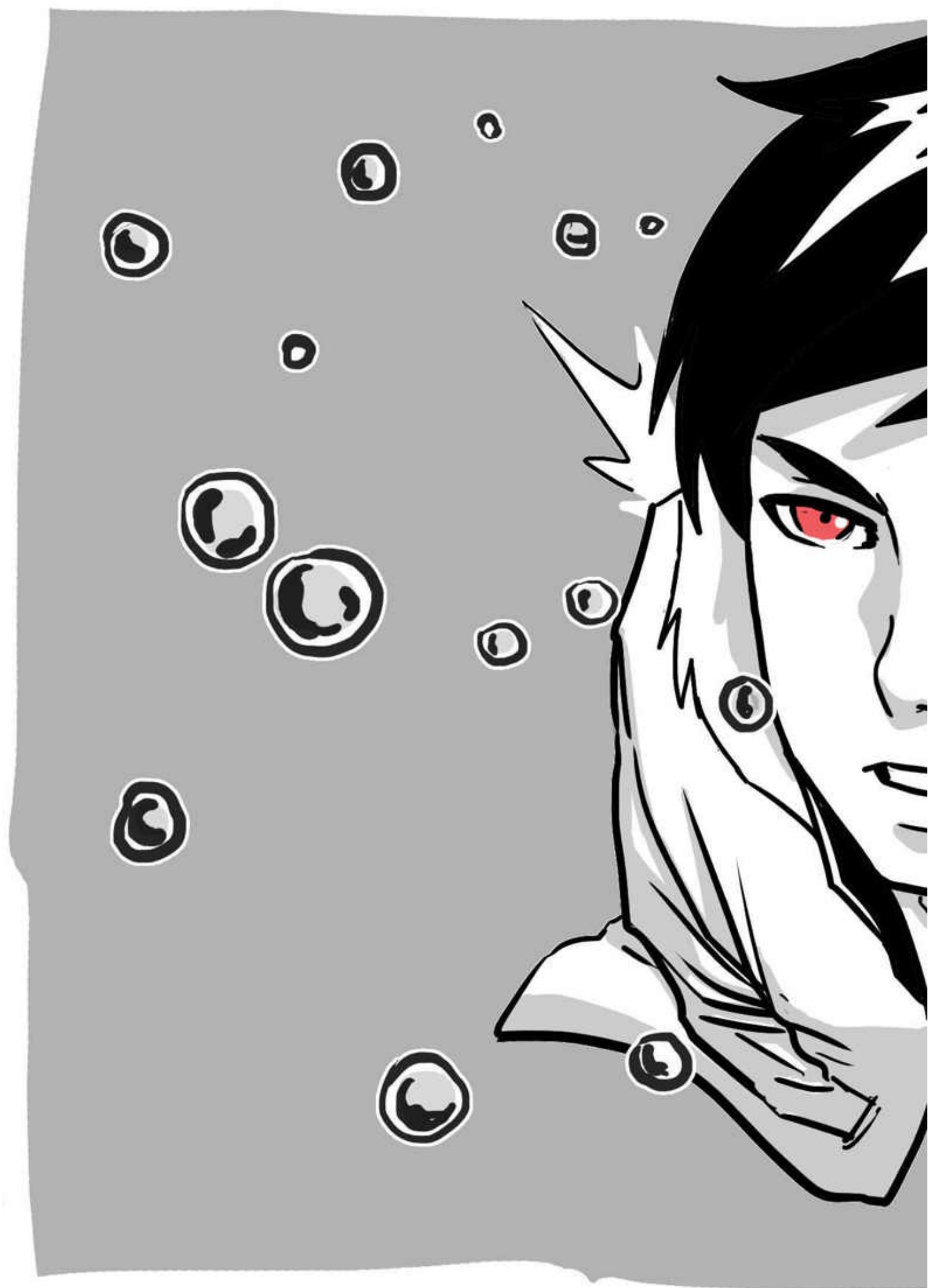
That soft and soothing voice, I remembered that voice. That was the voice of the white light figure in my dreams. How could I hear her voice? I was not dreaming now, was I? I tried to bit my right index finger to confirm and it hurt. But then still, how could I hear her voice here?

This ship had only made two third of the turn when the tidal wave collapsed and crashed with the ocean waters. The aftershock it caused mad this ship lose its balance. It was slanting almost half of its side, the slightest push will turn this ship over.

During this moment, I could feel a sharp pain in my head and my nosebleed was still running. I closed both of my eyes, pressed my right hand against my left eye, and ground my upper and lower teeth to suppress the pain. But no matter how hard I tried, the pain was still too sharp.

“—————“

For a moment I closed my eyes, but something odd was happening. The sound of the rain suddenly stopped, replaced with a soothing sound of calm waves. Slowly I opened my eyes as the pain gradually beginning to disappear. But as my eyes were adjusting themselves, all they saw was a sight of something impossible.





Thousands of raindrops, or even millions of them, were floating right in front of my eyes. The raging ocean had disappeared despite the sky was still shrouded in dark clouds.

“What happened—”

Tim, Alvi, and Peppy barged out from the lower deck soon with shocked look on their faces. Slowly I raised my body and tried to understand what happened. Jordan, Dasan, and Mory also could be seen in the bridge having a dazed looks.

I touched one of the raindrops, slowly the raindrop crept on my finger skin like a gel. But soon as I removed my finger, the water did not return to normal. The three men under the lower deck doorway also tried the same thing, with the same result.

The first one to snap out from this façade was Dasan, he immediately accelerated the ship when the sea was calm as water in a bathtub. The floating raindrops which collided with us only stretched like gels to avoid hitting us. The calm sea and the floating raindrops persisted despite the sky was still shrouded in storm cloud, even after we navigated through the storm, we never know what had happened.

All of us was trying to rationalize the situation as Dasan was getting us out of the storm, but none of us could even spit a theory. Except for me, that for some narcissistic reason I came to believe, quietly, that I might had something to do with this phenomenon.

Hours later when I was staring at the night horizon over calm seas, Jordan approached me. He offered me a cup of hot chocolate which I quite enjoyed.

“What do you think about today?” he asked with a look of suspicion in his eyes, I knew he must think that I had something to do with it.

“I don't know, I am just as clueless as you.”

“...” I didn't know what was in his mind, but I could see he seemed to had confirmed something in my answer. “Anyway, thanks.”

“For what? I hardly did anything.”

“...” again, he thought for an answer. “I must tell you something.”

“What's that?”

“Remember when I said a rescue party will be waiting for you in Mombasa?”

“Yeah?”

“I lied, there will be no rescue party.”

“...it is okay, I think I can make my own way to India.”

“That is not what I meant.”

“ ... ”

“What I mean is, it will not be a rescue party waiting for you in Mombasa...”

“What are you talking about?”

“When I reported about you yesterday, we knew that you were not a victim of plane crash, but you were wanted.”

“Huh?”

“You were wanted because you are said to be responsible for the fall of a private flight owned by Graille Einhorn.”

What he just said changed my emotion and expression. My eyes dilated and I couldn't hear anything else, my mind was too busy processing that previous stark raving information.

“What did you just say?”

It's that name again. A name that I kept hearing. I knew that name was important. But what? I crashed a plane? Seriously, what happened to me? I lost my memories, I kept seeing things, I didn't even know my name. And seeing what just happened earlier today...

...what am I?

Identity

22 June 2010

Coast of Mombasa

10.42

Seasick; that was what I should be feeling right now. Hours I spent alone, almost not budging a single step from this bed. But since I was too deep within my own thoughts, I could almost not feel it at all.

Also, since the only clock on this ship was located in the bridge and there was not a single clock in this infirmary, I didn't know what time it was. The only thing that showed time was the long shadow of bright morning sunrise that shone through the deck doorway which I caught glimpse of from the doorless infirmary sill moments ago, even I had lost track of how long had passed since then.

“Damn, where are those dreams when I want them?!”

I cursed myself, I cursed my own mind since I felt like if it's toying me, refused to show me any of those black and white vivid memories that I kept seeing yesterday. Instead, I got these intense sharp pain in my head every once and then when I tried to force it out.

After trying again and again, all I managed to squeeze out from my own brain were echoes of voices; gunshots, explosions, and screams. Despite being just voices, it made me wished I'd never heard it. Not because it was awful, but because it made me think that I might had something to do with that.

I barely had any sleep last night. Even had I done so, I would have woken up again in minutes. My anxiety prevented me from getting any good rest. However it prevented me from any sleepiness. I didn't feel sleepy even when morning had come.

It kind of enhanced my sense, though. My ears could hear footsteps entering the lower deck. There was not supposed to be anyone in the lower deck except me. The last time I heard someone's footsteps within the lower deck was a few hours ago; when whoever he was went up to the deck.

The footsteps was getting louder, but not enough to echo through as the corridor was not long enough and the footsteps itself was not that loud. It was only my own hearing that made them sounded louder. He passed the crew quarters, if he was not to enter the engine room, then he's here for me.

“Theodore?”

Despite my anticipation, Jordan's sudden intrusion into the infirmary had me jolted since I was deeply enjoying my solitude. After what he told me last night, I've chosen to seclude myself in the infirmary, trying to remember what happened to me while convincing myself that I am not someone bad.

I was preparing myself for what to come. I found it strange, though; I was not afraid. I might be facing legal sentence, but on the other hand, they will tell me who I am and what happened to me. Not that I was willing to give my liberty for answer, but I just couldn't see any other way.

“Yes?” I reply, softly.

“We are almost ashore.”

Reluctantly I stood, off from the bed where I laid my head and spent my night pondering. I knew that by that, he was saying that this was not the time to be preoccupied. It meant I should get ready.

I tried not to think of what was waiting for me, and it felt like someone was telling you not to mind the elephant in the room. Obviously I can't do that. As I stretched my back with both of my hands thrown upwards, I realised that my body apparently had betrayed my mind and rested, leaving my consciousness sleepless.

My mind was fixed on a subject that kept drawing my attention, my mind chose to ignore it, but the unease it caused made me keep looking back at it. And the more I saw it, the harder it was to overlook it.

“I'm coming.”

I said lazily while trying to hide my worry before I stood up and walked toward Jordan, who is waiting by the threshold that separated this infirmary and the lower deck corridor. To be honest, it felt like a prison guard was taking me to an execution. *“Ironical analogy,”* I thought.

“Why are you telling me this?” I slightly shouted, almost like talking normally, but with higher volume and tone.

It was last night, Jordan approached me on the deck when I was thinking after what happened that evening. No one knows what happened there exactly, but apart from mythical stories Tim was muttering, I believed that the storm was stopped because of me.

There Jordan explained to me that they, the whole ship's crew, had been lying. They said that there would be a rescue team waiting for me at Mombasa when we landed, where in reality, there will be a capture party.

“I am sorry, the others are convinced that you are a criminal.”

I sighed, I knew that there was no way I can't prove otherwise.

“They can't doubt it, it was official announcement,” Jordan continued.

“I can't blame you for that, I can't prove that I did not do what they claimed I did.”

“I'm telling this to you so you don't think ill of us. Deep down, I trust you. I am sure that you did not do that.”

“...” I was speechless, there was no one I could trust on this except myself, a ‘myself’ who didn't even know anything. “How can you say that?”

“To be honest, I don't know.” His answer slightly disappointed me, but I also felt glad about it. “Instinct perhaps, but it felt so strong I can't ignore it.”

“... thanks.”

I liked how he put a blind faith on me as if I was innocent despite many others say I was not. Unfortunately we only had one more day to see each other, I kind of wished that I had known him longer, we might have become good friends.

He offered me some drink later that night, which I regretted not accepting. Instead I headed to the infirmary and began to contemplate in solitude. Knowing

how I spent the night and how I felt right now about the whole thing, I should have taken that offer.

“I might have not said this enough,” Jordan whispered without looking at me as we walk through the corridor, “I'm sorry.”

I pretended I did not heard that, I noticed that Jordan knew that I was faking, but he also pretended he didn't notice. It kind of made me wanting to respond to what he said, but it was too late and it would have been awkward anyway.

I didn't know how long I spent shelling myself inside that infirmary, but apparently it was enough to make me forget how blinding can skylight gets. The clear blue skies along with the song of the seagulls' cry greeted me and Jordan who exited the lower deck.

After my eyes adjusted to the blinding sun ray, I noticed that we were approaching land which was now not too far in distance.

[The first time I've ever seen land ever since who knows when.]

This might be the only good side of having a mind of being born yesterday; I could truly appreciate the beauty of small things that everybody else can see every day.

“HOME!”

Tim yelled loudly against the roar of the ship breaking the waves from the bow. His voice was surprisingly loud enough to compete with the sea's rumble.

“Will somebody pull him off before he claims to be king again?!”

Dasan mocked at Tim from the bridge with a sound that was also enough to compete with the waves. Dasan's shouting immediately followed by laughter from Mory, Peppy, and Alvi who were also standing by on the deck.

Roughly thirty minutes later, the ship finally docked the Mombasa pier. An ambulance had been waiting for our ship on the pier before we even reached it. And after we docked, all the ship's crew except for Jordan, are pretending to be busy. Dasan, Mory, and Peppy pretend to unload fishes from their cargo. While Tim and Alvi pretend to check the engine room.

Before I disembarked from this ship, I made a last trip to the infirmary. Not to

reminisce, two days in this place gave me nothing to remember, except for that storm, and even that did not happen in the infirmary. I came back to this infirmary just to retrieve the last thing that belonged to me; my 'Theodore Quentin' winter jacket.

Left on the deck beside me was Jordan, who seemed everybody had chosen to represent them in bidding me farewell. However it didn't seem he knew what he should say.

"So, this is farewell, huh?" I said jokingly.

"Sorry for the other, they meant well."

"Naah, it is fine. Just tell them thanks, without all of you I'd be dead already."

Unexpectedly, he raised his right hand forward, offering me a handshake. And since I was surprised, I awkwardly accepted his gesture. To think of it, he was the only one I did not shake when the first time the others introduced themselves. This made a good follow up, despite being a little too late.

"They've been waiting for you," he said as he taps on my right shoulder with his left hand while our hands were still shaking and then pointed at two men in greenish shirt uniform who were standing on the pier.

It was a bit hard, but after I spotted the two men, I let my grip off from Jordan's hand and wore the jacket that I was holding on my left arm. Without saying anything else, I walked off the deck into the pier. Only after a few steps later I realised that I had not say good bye. But then I refrained, seeing how Jordan has turned his back and enter the upper deck.

I turned my back and walk faster to the pier, where the two men wearing greenish shirts and black pants were waiting. As I walked on the pier which was paved with oval-shaped stones to the alley which connects with the streets, one of them realised my presence and warned the other. Before I could reach them, both of them also approached me. And since I knew that they were not here to take care of me, I had to be careful.

"Lieutenant Theodore Quentin?" the one wearing eyeglasses asked with bleak voice.

"Yes," I answered with my head instinctively did a single nod.

“We are your rescue team, sir.”

[*What a lie.*]

From the very beginning, he had lied to me. His answered gave me more reason to watch over myself.

“My name is Odi, and this is Rick.”

It was very hard for me to fake a smile right now, but since they were the only way I could know about myself, I tried to stay in character.

“Our transport is parked in the street, we will take you to be extracted.”

“S-Sure.”

I was flustered because I was thinking what they would do to me. The best scenario would be that they were really taking me to Graille Einhorn, and the worst scenario being they'd kill me here and now. Because if what everybody was saying was true that I crashed an aircraft, that was the most reasonable thing to do. I was scared they would do the later, but apparently they were taking advantage of my confusion.

After we walk out from the alley, I can see a red and white vehicle that looked like an ambulance was parked on the street. Odi and Rick walked me towards it, looked like I'd be taken in after all.

“So, sir, our report says that you are amnesiac?”

Odi began to talk as we approached the ambulance. I was glad he opened up, because walking with them, two people I didn't know well, in silence was very uncomfortable.

“Uh-huh, I couldn't remember anything prior from the first night I was rescued from that fishermen's ship,” I answered after a short pause. “Can you tell me what happened?”

“Frankly, we don't know the exact story, sir. We are just told to pick you up here.”

[*That figures, they are just underlings.*]

“But our report says that you got caught in a helicopter crash,” Rick added.

“I already know that, the fishermen told me yesterday.”

“We are sorry, sir. We don't know anything else,” Odi continued, and as he spoke we already reached the back door of the ambulance.

“But you should be assured, we are taking you to someone who knows.”

“Really?”

CLICK

I did not bother to see when Odi opened the ambulance's back door since I was too focused on talking to Rick. Wrong move. Because soon after the door opened, a third figure suddenly jumped out from the ambulance and put a bag onto my head.

“What the—”

I resisted and so do they, but before I could even comprehend what was happening, one of them muffled my mouth and nose with his hand. Suddenly this strong, pungent stench got through the thick cloth of bag that was covering my head.

[Chloroform!]

———!

The smell induced my thought, making my body felt this sudden irresistible fatigue. By the time the hand that muffled let my mouth and nose go, my head felt too heavy to react, and before I fell like a log, I could hear that voice again; the voice of someone calling my name silently.

On the bright side, though, this was the first sleep I have since yesterday.

———!

It's that voice again, despite I couldn't even hear my name, I could hear how she called me. Not the word, but the tone. It was friendly and gentle, it soothed me during this uneasy moments of being drugged.

———!

[Shut up...]

The first two times it called me were soothing, but the third time kind of

annoyed me. Before I was drugged, I was alert, but after I fell unconscious, my sleepiness took over. My body refused to wake up, I didn't know how to tell the voice to let me have some rest.

———!

[*What?!*]

My inner voice shouted, and it echoed in the empty chamber of my mind. In an instant I opened my eyes. Not my real eyes, but the eyes that I used to see dreams.

I awakened, my senses had recovered. My sense for vision, for hearing, to smell, to talk and to feel. I am back to that room where the sky is white and the bottom is black.

I looked to my left and I realised that this time I arrived in a different place. Instead of sitting on a chair behind a wooden desk, I was now sitting under a tree. A small willow tree, the tree itself looked like it was real; the brown and grey of its woods, the green of its leaves, and the red and yellow of its dead leaves.

This was the first time I saw other colours than dull colours in this room. There was something odd with it though, despite I couldn't feel any wind here, the leaves and branches of it sways around slowly as if it was being blown by wind.

There was also a book on my lap, it's not thick, but it just plain white. The cover is blank, and when I checked it, I found that every pages of it was clean.

———!

There was that sound again, but this time, I could hear where exactly it came from.

“WHA—”

I was shocked when I turned my face to my right, a white figure was standing very close from me, just one step away from me. Her hip-long hair is waving to her left because of the non-existent wind while she used her right hand to hold her waist long hair from entering her non-existent eyes.

“What do you want?”

I was too shocked, and just like before, an ethereal voice of mine could be heard. My voice was different, somehow lighter. Also, unlike last time I saw her, the white figure was now apparently wearing sleeveless blouse and jeans, not a sundress.

“Were you sleeping here?!”

She shouted at me. Her voice sounded tough, but I could still hear a hint of feminine voice.

“So what? Why are you here anyway?”

“If you could answer me earlier, I would not have to walk here!” she scolded me while crossing her arms.

“It's subtly implied, if I'm not answering, then I don't want you coming.”

“... whatever.” She gave up, while raking the right part of her hair from entering her face. “Eve's been looking for you.”

“Eve? What for?”

“She asked for the new book you borrowed.”

“Oh, this book? Tell her to wait, I haven't finished it.”

“Then quickly finish it.”

“It's hard, I fell asleep through it every time.”

“Then just let Eve read it first!”

“No way, she'll spend three days reading this. I will finish this book tonight. Now let me rest.”

“Ah, so you really were sleeping here?!”

“Like I said, so what?”

“You shouldn't sleep here!”

After standing and scolding me from where she was standing, she began to approach me and yanked my right hand. And just like before, like when I shook Doctor Graille Einhorn black silhouette's hand, despite her indistinct form, her

touch felt so real. She took my right arm and pulled it as hard as she could, but no matter how hard she pulled, I did not budge. I did not even resisting, but she definitely tried to pull me out.

[Just let me stay, I'll be back to the house before night!]

“No way! Wake up!”

“You're annoying!”

“Wake up!”

“...wake up!”

“...wake up...”

She kept pulling my right arm, again and again. Until slowly her voice faded away, but it kept echoing. And little by little, the sensation of her pull changed to another force from outside of my body.

I regained my consciousness; gradually I was becoming alert of my surroundings. I could hear the sound of engine and car horn honking vaguely, but I couldn't see anything. I then remembered that they put a bag over my head, of course I couldn't see.

Also, when I tried to move my hands, I couldn't. Both of my hands were bound tightly behind my back. I could feel what was binding my hands, it was not steel cold, so I thought it would not be handcuffs. It was not bold, so I thought it would not be rope. And it was thin. I was guessing zip tie.

Zip ties, despite their reedy structure, are still physically hard to break. I had to give up after a few tries, because instead of making it stretched by expanding my wrist by pushing my hands against each other, I hurt my own wrist.

Despite being blinded, I tried to absorb my surrounding, I remembered the last thing happened to me before I arrived here was being bagged by my 'rescue party.' While I was now sitting on a bench, my back was rested onto a wall.

And from indistinct voice of traffic outside, I thought they are driving me somewhere in their ambulance.

“Shit, the Supervisor is slow on responding.”

“How long since you ask for directive?”

“Almost an hour ago.”

“Well, just report that we will not be on time.”

So far I hadn't yet to make a movement, except for when I was trying to spread my arms, in case there was someone with me here. And after hearing two mumbled whispers from my left, I knew I was right. If I were moving, I bet they would do something bad to me, not as if this situation wasn't bad enough.

[Think straight!]

I cleared my mind, trying to come out with a rational plan. I knew that whatever I had in mind, I had to free myself first. And no matter what, I had to do it fast, I also knew that when they let me go, I'd be in a dangerous place and situation.

Twist my hands forward by moving my hands upward? Not without breaking my shoulder and pull some muscle. Spin my hands forward by moving my hands through my legs? Could be, but I will need to maintain balance, and soon as they notice my movements, they would apprehend me. Such fight would be easier if I wasn't blindfolded.

The only best choice was to keep stretching the zip tie until it gives in. It would be very hard, but scraped wrist is still a better option than whatever they would do.

After another meaningless few tries, I noticed that not only the zip tie wouldn't stretch, I was also sitting uncomfortably. I could feel something, some kind of hard bulge preventing my base from sitting comfortably.

[A wallet? I don't have any. A mobile phone? Less likely.]

I tried to remember what I could have put in my back pocket, I didn't remember putting anything inside it. What even I had to place there? My mind tried to dig deeper, but I was sure that after I woke up on that boat, I didn't have anything in my pockets. This means either I put something between then and now, or that they had put something there, but I doubt it.

Again, I tried to recall everything I did up to this point; I woke up, met the

ship crews, helped them through a storm...

[Wait, that's it!]

I remembered, I put a pocket knife there after I helped securing the sail. I guess they forgot to ask it back, but now I was grateful they did.

Being precautions, I moved my right hand slowly toward my right back pocket. It couldn't be helped when my left hand was also moved there. If I could see myself now, I knew I would look suspicious. That was why I keep listening to their conversation, and so far they seemed to be focused in their talks they hadn't noticed me.

Awkwardly I pulled the pocket knife out. I tried to make as little movement as possible. I didn't want to attract their attention. I tried to pull it, but my weight was pressing it against the bench. The lesser the effort I make, the later I could pull it out, but also the safer from their attention I should be. Fortunately after it reached a certain point, it finally slid out smoothly.

Now a folded knife rested in my hand. It's not hard to unfold the knife from its handle. And after turning its edge to rest on the zip tie, I began to hinge my hand up and down while applying a slight weight to it so it slowly cuts through the zip tie.

Knock Knock

“Hey, Gyle, how long do you think we'll need?”

“I don't know, might be a while, though. This traffic is a nightmare.”

Since now I was focused to cutting the zip tie, I tried to listen their conversation. It seems this car is stuck in traffic, and I was glad it did. If it were not, I might not have enough time to free myself.

[It's tearing...]

I could feel that the zip tie was expanding, my knife cut through. Also it cut easier the more I cut.

“Ah, finally! It's the Supervisor!”

“Oh, what does he say?”

“He says, ‘take your time, but I expect the package soon. I’ll change your schedule, don’t be late.’”

[The Supervisor?]

It seemed the one they referred to as ‘the Supervisor’ was the one that was responsible for my capture. It kind of made me wonder if I still had business with Graille Einhorn or if I had more enemies.

“Tell him we will report more when we reach the transport.”

“...’kay”

[Just a little more...]

I tried to expand my hands, just a little more and I can force it to break.

“Have you checked on him?”

“Ah, I forgot.”

[Got it!]

Just in the nick of time, ten more seconds they would have found out. And right after he unveiled the bag that was covering my head, I swung my right hand and hit him hard on his left temple with my pocket knife's handle.

He didn't have time and reflex to evade, my blow landed perfectly and throw him leftward, further against the back door.

These people were not experienced in combat apparently, they gave me enough time to survey my environment. The person I hit earlier was Rick and the other one sitting in this room was Odi. Right now, I was trapped inside the back of an ambulance. An ambulance that had no medical equipment what-so-ever. It was just a disguise.

“Gyle!”

Soon as Odi began to react, instead of attacking him using the knife in my right hand, I stomped my right leg upward and boot Odi right on his screaming jaw. The impact from my blow was strong it made him bounce against the front wall and made him unconscious.

“What is happening back there?!”

A voice from the front could be heard, I remembered the third figure, the one that blindfolded me back at the pier. Odi called him Gyle, and I needed him awake. There were a lot of things I need to know from him.

“Odi? Rick?!”

He will have to come here if he wanted to know what happened, but before that, I needed to secure these two sluggers. I noticed a pack of zip ties in Rick's pocket, so I put my knife back to my back pocket and take some of the zip ties to bind Rick's and Odi's legs and hands with them.

“Are you all right?!”

As I'm checking Rick's and Odi's pocket for something that might help them to escape, I could hear the front door being opened and slammed back shut, the driver was coming to see the back side. I didn't find any gun or knife. But beside their wallets, I found an electric taser and a radio transmitter in Rick's pocket, and another one and a mobile phone in Odi's pocket. The taser might be useful, but I didn't need the phone and the transmitters. But for some reason, I kept the mobile phone anyway.

CLINK

I was ready, just after I made sure these two won't go anywhere soon, the back door's handle began to move. Slowly it opened, revealing the view of main road's packed traffic. Some of the car behind this ambulance reflected the noon sun's bright light, I had to cover top-half of my eyes to see clearly.

A figure had begun to emerge, eclipsing the blinding reflected sunlight. I couldn't see him clearly, but without wasting time, I charged toward the door.

“Halt!”

I stopped immediately, only about two steps away from hitting him, not because of his order, but because I noticed that he's pointing his right hand that was concealed inside his jacket pocket. First thing I realised was of course, that he was carrying a gun inside his jacket pocket.

“Get back,” he continued, while also flicking his right hand that was still concealed inside his jacket pocket.

He was not too different from the other two. He wore pale green shirt and black pants, but he also wore a cyan jacket on in which his right hand was hiding inside its right hip pocket. And unlike Odi and Rick who had shaggy haircut, this man was just bald.

I walked slowly backwards with both of my hands on the air, showing that I was compelled to him. After I made a certain distance between me and him, he started to climb in despite the queuing traffic behind this ambulance. Either he knew that this car won't move soon or he just didn't care.

“What did you do?” he ask, “did you...”

“I did not kill them.”

He closed the back door after he entered the threshold. This could be my chance, but the distance between me and him, I was sitting on almost the end of the left bench and he was just in front of the back door. Still one step too far to provide one instance for pulling a gun's trigger.

“Where are you taking me?” I had to try to ask. My question was out of place, coming from the victim, who was under the looming threat of a concealed gun.

“It's not up to me to answer that question.”

“At least tell me who I am.”

“Ha hah,” he laughs mockingly, “usually people ask about us in this kind of situation.”

“...” I could only stare cynically. “Okay, then; who are you?”

“Unfortunately, I couldn't answer that either.”

It appeared he had no intention to answer. If it were not for the gun he was supposedly holding, I would have knocked him out. There was half a chance that he didn't really have a gun, but I am not betting on that.

For a moment, we could only stare at each other. While I had reached the end of my side, he kept advancing, as if he was waiting for a chance to disarm me. If he was really holding a gun and he wanted to kill me, he had his chance, which meant that he preferred to have me unscratched.

“Ugh...”

Rick suddenly groaned a weak whimper. I couldn't blame him, I hit him quite hard on the head. I didn't even need to move my head to look at him, only a slight roll of my eyes to check his condition. But apparently, Gyle needed to.

“Rick? You okay?”

This was the chance I need,. It was brief window of opportunity, but just enough. Gyle got distracted. I jumped from the bench and use my left hand to grab his right wrist which had slightly lowered upon his distraction.

BLAM

He was surprised, essentially, but in panic, he pulled the trigger. Luckily the material that made this ambulance was not too thick. The bullet pierced through. But it was not the only damage it did, the gun wasn't equipped with silencer, and since we are practically inside a sealed metal box, the blast it made was enough to make us deaf. Just like sitting inside a bell when it tolls.

Static pinging distorted my hearing, which I tried to repress as hard as I could. Gyle tried the same thing, but unlike me, he used his left hand to muffle his left ear, trying to stabilise himself.

I recovered faster than him, with this advantage, I planed to topple him. His balance was already falling apart, I only needed to apply a small pressure to make him collapse.

Despite still having a hard time suppressing the pinging noise, I straightened my right palm. I raised my arm to face level, made a quite distance from my target so I could build a nice momentum before my blow impacts. And with the force like a battering ram, I pushed my right palm towards his face, exactly aiming for the bridge between his nose and his eyes.

My attack landed roughly, the force knocked him backwards, but since I was holding his right hand, he bounced back like a broken yo-yo. He toppled, just like I wanted him to. He knelt and almost lost footing. The last thing supporting him to stand on his left knee was my left hand that was holding his right hand.

I didn't want to lose him, and I knew he wouldn't stand soon. So I just let my grip off, and he crumbled rightward like a timbering wood. I noticed that Rick was awaking. I spun my body clockwise and backhand slapped him with my

fist. His head wobbled twice after I hit him before he finally blacked out again.

While he tried to get back on his feet, I disarmed Gyle. I picked the small handgun that he kept inside his right jacket pocket, and then I sat on the bench across him. I waited until he finally managed to sit on the right bench, which took him almost half a minute to do.

“Just kill me,” he said in raspy tone.

“I need to know something.”

“...” he stares at me sharply.

“Do you know who I am?”

“...” he keeps staring.

“Do you know who I am?!”

“...”

I repeated my question and I raised my volume. But apparently, it still not enough to make him talk.

“...” he keeps staring at me.

Might had been just me, but the more I asked, I felt like his stare was becoming more provoking.

“DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?!”

This time I shouted my loudest, even hearing my own voice shortly echoing here, making me uncomfortable.

“...”

“DO YOU KNOW WHO I AM?!”

I couldn't yell any louder, so instead I changed my question into a demand. With the same query, I pointed the gun in my hand at him.

“...”

I detected a hint of grin smearing on his face, I didn't like it. I grinded my teeth holding my impatience that was turning into anger. It slowly consumed me, tempting me to pull the trigger.

Gyle closed his eyes, seemingly preparing himself if I really shot him. It was just a small squeeze, but it felt like trying to break an egg with one hand. I simply couldn't do it.

I took a deep breath after I got rid of the gun from Gyle's face, trying to calm myself down.

[What was the cursed thing that possessed me?!]

I realised that I was hold by guilt. I was not a murderer. I did not crash that helicopter. I was not what the world said about me.

Soon after I became much calmer, I noticed that Gyle was smiling.

“What are you looking at?” I said.

“You feel it don't you?”

“What?”

“I can see right through you.”

[What the fuck is this guy talking about?]

“You have it, haven't you? That feral instinct that drives you to the extremes to get what you want?”

“ ... ”

“I don't know who you are, but I know why I was sent to get you.”

“ ... ”

“You are a murderer, you just look like one.”

I frowned, I didn't know if that was true, but what important for me was that I knew that I was willing to bleed these veins dry to prove that what he said was not true.

[He doesn't know anything.]

His last statement proved it, he could only guess.

“If you believe that your past does not define who you are now, you are wrong. You are still who you are before—”

While still clenching a gun, I punched him right in his mouth. I did not use

full force, just enough to shut his jabbering orifice down.

“Ouch!”

The back of my finger clashed against his solid incisors, and perhaps his left canines. But as I saw now, my punch served its purpose to silence him.

“Shut the fuck up,” I said in cold tone while applying the gun's safety.

With now seemingly clear conscience, I could think straight. I remembered that killing any of these guys won't give me anything but minute satisfaction which will soon turn into livelong regret and disappointment. It will also prove that I am who they say I am, and I didn't like it.

The better plan was to let him take me to his destination. I knew that my quest was not a journey that I could quit mid-way, this was a mission where I could only find all the answers at the end of the road.

BEEP BEEP BEEP

And hearing the traffic's horns shouting one after another, I knew what I had to do. I put the gun and slip it on my back, and I knelt in front of Gyle barehandedly and stare at him coldly and sharply.

“I want to know where you are going to take me, you will take me there.”

“...” he only replied with another stare, I almost pull the gun again before he answered, “forget it.”

“I'm not asking you to, I'm ordering you to.”

“You are a madman, you are not supposed to come to them, you are supposed to run away from them.”

“I'm looking for answers, and I will do anything to get them.”

“ ... ”

For a moment he went silent, might be scaling the risk and consequence, or thinking his professional code, or just putting the right words to respond to my statement. But whatever he thought, in the end it led him into bursting to laugh.

“Ha ha hah,” he stopped after laughing shortly, he seemed still in pain after I punched his mouth. “Fine, I'll do it. But open their tie.”

He was pointing at Rick and Odi who were still lying unconscious, and obviously his request didn't make sense. "No way, now get out."

I tugged both of his jacket and shirt back collar and push him out from the ambulance. Outside, the traffic had been waiting for us since at least a few tens of metres in front of us the traffic had begun to move forward.

We traced the right side of the ambulance until Gyle finally reached the front side of the ambulance. He entered the driver's seat and I entered the front passenger seat. Not too long after, the traffic where we stuck in starts to move.

"Go," I demanded softly while wearing my seatbelt and watching Gyle doing the same.

Since we were still driving with the traffic, the first ten minutes we shared was just radio silence. Since I didn't know the layout of the city, I could only watch as Gyle drove and when sometimes he gurgled some water from a bottled water to wash his bleeding gum.

The silence was unbearable, especially since we did not like each other. Since I knew he would never initiate a talk, I chose to question him some more.

"Who sent you to capture me?"

"..."

"Hey, I'm asking you; who sent you to capture me?"

"So what if I'm not answering? You do realise that I am driving, right?"

"..." his taunting comment didn't provoke me, but I still didn't like him condescending me. "And do you know that even if you crash this car, I can still make you live with permanent physical damage?"

I noticed that he took my statement, because I don't know how or why, but I really knew how to do what I said. And to prove that I was serious, I drew the gun out and point it at him.

"Well?"

"..." he stared at my gun that I held as low as possible but still aiming directly to his head, and after swallowing his own spit, he started to speak up, "I don't know."

“What do you mean?”

“I don't know who is paying us to capture you, we never had direct contact.”

“...” so these guys were just hired thugs, they held no importance of any kind.
“I heard you were talking about someone called the Supervisor, who is he?”

“I... don't know.”

“Don't lie.”

“I don't, okay? We are only getting short text directive from a mobile phone.”

“This one?” I asked as I drew out a long candybar mobile phone, its interface had been highly modified. It required passcode to access its main menu.

“...” he doesn't answer.

“I take it as a ‘yes,’” I said while playing with the phone with my left hand and still aiming my handgun at him. “What's the passcode?”

“...” he was having a hard time choosing if he should answer my question or not. “The Supervisor is the one who organises our targets, he sends our assignments from that phone and if we succeed he will transfer our payment. We never see him face to face.”

“So the Supervisor is not your highest boss, huh?” I confirmed as I put the phone back into my pocket.

“I don't think so.”

[Fucking useless...]

“By the way, where are you taking me? It's been twenty minutes and we have yet to see our destination.”

“...” Gyle paused for a long couple of seconds, “I—”

Knock Knock

Suddenly twice a banging noise against the wall that separated the front seats and the back side could be heard.

[What is the meaning of this? So all these times, he has just been stalling?!]

“I'm sorry, Lieutenant,” he said. I didn't know if he really believed that I was

Theodore Quentin or not since he referred to me with Quentin's rank, “but I've told you too much.”

That's right, they had a plan and I fell into their trap. I underestimated them, despite being inexperienced in hand-to-hand combat, they were quite well coordinated.

SCREECH

What he did next was beyond my expectation, Gyle sharply turned his ambulance rightward. And in the tight time gap between realising the sudden shift and hitting the wall of a small store, Gyle reached for my seatbelt hook and released it, I could see him smiling before the ambulance's front end hits a solid wall surface with a considerable force.

Under a tiny fraction of time available to me, between realising Gyle had released my seatbelt and hitting the wall, my brain went into a drive figuring out how I could minimize the impact for my body. Replugging my seatbelt into its slot was not an option, it took too much time and precision to do which was impossible to do in mere seconds. Covering my face with both of my hands was not good either, I could break my wrist bones doing it. Hiding under the dashboard was also not a good plan, despite the there was a long machine compartment between the front-end and front seats, there was a possibility that I would get stuck or even worse, get crushed.

The only sensible action was to lie down horizontally on the front seat. Even if I got thrown upon impact, my whole body will clash with the dashboard and take minimum damage. I didn't have to worry about the glass pieces from the windshield in case it will shatter since I was wearing a jacket, all I needed to do was to cover my face in it.

It felt like I took my time thinking everything while not even a second had passed since Gyle released my seatbelt, and only another to do exactly what I had planned. I immediately dropped my body rightward, raised my legs onto the seat to lie on my side, and covered my head into my jacket. Soon after I reached the position I wanted, I closed my eyes and braced for impact.

For most of people, this would be all in an instant, but not me for some reason. Despite closing my eyes, I could feel everything. How the front-end

crashed against the solid texture of a wall, and how the force of the impact transferred through from the front most to the backmost. My body was thrown forward and clashed against the dashboard, I was expecting myself to fall into the gap below the dashboard and the seat, but I was bounced back onto my seat instead.

The next thing was the rain of shattered glass' pieces, the thick fabric of my jacket protected me well from their sharp edges, and apart from my sore left side that clashed with the dashboard, I was fine. After the impact, I slowly opened my eyes, I could feel something was feeling my left pocket. I remember that it was where I kept the phone, immediately I raise, but I was too late. Gyle had already seized the phone from me, but then, instead of keeping it safe, he broke it by smashing it against the dashboard.

Hearing the two knocks that triggered this whole fiasco, I realised that Rick and Odi must have let themselves loose, which meant they would aid Gyle to apprehend me soon. I had only a little time to recover, first thing I needed to do was to look for weapon. I looked below, to the gap below the dashboard and the seat. I noticed my gun was lying there.

I reached it effortlessly and immediately opened the passenger door and left the ambulance while Gyle was still struggling to release his seatbelt. I didn't know whether the wall was too weak or the car's front-end that was too strong, apparently the ambulance had gone through the wall of a small convenience store.

“Rick, cover the right!”

I could hear a shout along with the sound of the back ambulance door being slammed, it was Odi's voice. Hearing his voice made me refrain from running behind the ambulance into a small alley beside the convenience store and entered the convenience store through the hole instead. I checked my handgun. I knew that this kind of handguns only held nine bullets, and since Gyle fired one earlier, assuming he had fully loaded it, that means this gun has eight bullets inside it.

The insides of the convenience store was pretty much chaos, fortunately the cashier was right in other side of the room. Had she been near the entrance door,

it would have been fatal.

BLAM

When I noticed Odi appearing from the left side of the ambulance, I released my gun's safety and fired a shot. It didn't hit him, but instead ricocheted from the ambulance's side onto the alley. Fortunately there were not so many people here to take that hit.

In the other side, Gyle and Rick had teamed up, from them I could see that they had guns. Both of them were holding one-handed automatic machine gun which I didn't know how they got them. I didn't know about Odi, but I assumed that he was the same.

“You can still surrender, Lieutenant!” Gyle shouted while still covering behind the ambulance's engine after my first shot at Odi.

[Never!]

Promptly I took cover behind one of the counters without replying, obviously I didn't want to be with them.

I was not alone inside this store, apparently there was another person hiding at the other end of the counter. It was a woman. She's sitting against the counter while covering her ears.

Oddly, I felt like I'd seen her before. Her hair was long, waist-long, but her figure is eerily familiar. She looked like the white figure I've been seen within my dreams.

[It can't be...]





Their automatic machine guns spewed barrages of bullets. Their shots hit and pierced through at the wooden counter at my left. I would have died if I were hiding behind it, and after looking at that terrified figure, I notice that my attention has been slightly unfocused.

My eyes were focused to her, I needed to reach her, but even if I managed to reach her, I still have to save her.

“Lieutenant!”

DRA-DA-DA-DA-DAT

Unlike before, they aimed lower. It would seem that their objective was to catch me alive. It's true that they might had something that I wanted to know, but there was another potential piece of clue at the other end of this room.

I tiptoed while slightly crouching across the counters with a gun on my right hand, I walked awkwardly trying to conceal my head from the counter's level.

“Odi, check the counters!” Gyle ordered from behind the ambulance.

I didn't know how far we were from the nearest police station, but at this rate, they would get caught if I run now. But first, I had to save that girl first.

BLAM

Hearing Gyle's order earlier made me took a peek from the top of the counter. I found Odi was advancing towards the counter but he hadn't noticed that I'd moved. I took that advantage to shoot him on his right leg.

“Ahh!”

Odi tumbled soon as he felt the hot lead pierced through his right calf, he screamed after he realised what had hit him.

“He's there!” Gyle shouted again.

DRA-DA-DA-DA-DAT

Another barrage of bullets spewed through, hitting and piercing the wooden counter I passed through while I kept trying to reach that girl. She didn't even budge hearing gunshots around her, instead she was covering her ears even tighter as if it would stop those men from firing.

“Hey!” I shouted at her.

She didn't hear me calling her, she was covering her ears tight enough to make her completely oblivious to me.

“Hey!” I called her again, this time I was close enough to tap on her left shoulder.

“No!” she shouted in terror, she even tried to fight by flailing her hand which I caught effortlessly.

“Hey, hey, don't worry, I'm not going to hurt you,” I whispered trying to calm her down since she was visibly gasping and shocked.

“There is a door there,” I said as I pointed towards the door beside the counters, “I want you to go to it while I will try to distract them, okay?”

Soon after I finished my instruction, I immediately rose until I could comfortably aim my handgun from the top of the counter. But before I could even fire, she pulled my left elbow which forced me to crouch again.

“What is it?” I ask her.

She shook her head precipitately, signing that she couldn't make the run.

“How about together? Can you do it?” she was still shaking, despite pushing her would be more dangerous, but that seemed to be the only way that I could make her move. “Ready? Three... two... one... go!”

BLAM

BLAM

I pulled her left armpit and pushed her left shoulder toward the door after I fired a shot. I could see Rick and Gyle were aiming at us, but before they could pull their triggers, I had fired mine. Despite my shot did not hit them, it's enough to make them took cover and stopped aiming. Meanwhile Odi's position didn't allow him to fire at us.

Fortunately the door opened smoothly. We entered it and reached the storage room. The girl immediately went for the door to her right, but since that door supposedly led directly to the streets, I pulled her away from it and told her to go the other way.

“Follow them!” Gyle shouted as me and the girl hastily left him and his team.

We traced the small corridor until it finally ended with a door. The girl opened the door and we reached an alley.

“Keep going, I will follow you!” I told the girl who stopped running after seeing me standing still by the exit.

She shook her head again, signing that she didn't want to leave without me. She couldn't understand that I was doing this to disarm my opponent. Despite I knew that it will be harder, I let her to stay where she was since I didn't have time to tell her my plan.

Not too long after I waited, Gyle and Rick appeared running from the door, both of them did not expect my presence behind the door. I seized my chance to strike them with a surprise attack.

I flipped my handgun so now I was holding it upside down. And with it under my hand, I used it to hit Rick's right shoulder.

Upon receiving my attack, Rick fell while also dropping his machine gun. Right after, Gyle turned around and starts to swing his right hand and aimed his machine gun at me.

He was fast, but not fast enough and not far enough. Before Gyle could point his machine gun at my head, I blocked his right hand using my left hand before it could make a straight line toward my face.

After I caught his hand, I continued by backhand-slapping his right hip using my right fist after I dropped my handgun. Twice I hardly stroked his right hip before I use the valley between my right thumb and index finger to blow his windpipe.

Gyle tumbled to his knees, I toppled him by kicking him on his chest with my right foot.

[One down.]

I caught my breath, trying to compensate for the stamina I used to knock Gyle out. I noticed the girl was watching me fighting while hiding behind the wall of a house to my right. She was safe, and I still had to take care of Rick.

When I turned around, but I did not notice that Rick had recovered. Rick punched my right cheek using his left hand. I got thrown aback, he continued by kicking the back of my left knee.

His sweep made me fall and I collapsed on my back. He continued by sitting onto my stomach, but before he could pin me, I managed to block him from sitting on my abdomen by pulling my right knee to my chest. With all the might I could gather on my right leg, I pushed him away and I try to recover my footing.

I walked toward him aggressively before he tried to kick my left hip with his right leg. I blocked his attack by lifting my left knee up to my chest again and immediately dropped my leg again before he could topple me.

He took a stance and put both of his fists in front of him. I didn't know any martial arts, so I just casually faced him. He threw two jabs, which one I avoided by swaying rightward and the other one I blocked with my right hand. But then I realised he wasn't showing me his hand-to-hand combat capability, he was only learning mine.

I didn't want to take that chance, so when he threw another jab, instead of blocking or avoiding it I punched his left jab with my right fist.

I felt pain, but I tried to disregard. Rick pulled his left hand back, I could see that he felt ache on his left fist, and I also know that his was worse then mine.

Soon after I could not feel the ache on my fist, I continued attacking. This time trying to directly kick his chest.

He avoided it by stepping rightward, since my position was low enough he tried to kick my left temple with his left knee. I could read his movement, so I moved my head rightward and his attack hit air instead of me.

I recovered myself and made a distance, surprisingly Rick was quite adept in hand to hand combat. Apparently my single blow back in the ambulance was a lucky strike.

He seemed rather confident fighting against me, proven by how he let me to catch my breath during our fight. I should not underestimate him.

We were stuck strafing against each other, none of us willing to engage. After

halfway reaching a full circle, I found that he was waiting for me to make a move. I gulped my spit, this man was not someone I could wait for a chance.

After stabilising my breath and exhaled a long breath, I swiftly advanced toward him silently. I raised my right fist and swing it to his left temple but he managed to block it with his left hand. I continued by throwing a straight punch with my left hand while pulling my right hand, this time he did not block my punch, but he avoided it by swaying to his left.

Suddenly I noticed that I was awfully too close with him. He immediately used his right knee to strike my abdomen. Fortunately I briefly noticed his move so I managed to block his attack with both of my hands.

He pushed me back about two steps. After I regained my balance, I pushed back by throwing another punch with my right hand. I thought he was going to evade, but he catch my right hand instead and pull me closer to him. He spun his upper body half a circle counter clockwise, his right elbow to my face.

Just barely, but I managed to dodge his attack by throwing my whole body rightward and pulling my right hand free. Without even stopping, I continued by swinging my right hand back to his head. He avoided it again by crouching, but he's not just crouching.

He crouched while also spinning himself counter clockwise, while extending his right leg. He swung his foot and aims it to my left hip which is open.

If I started moving now, I could stop his attack, but I refrained and accept his kick to land on my body.

[*Ugh!*]

His kick was strong, enough to make almost my entire left side numb, but was not enough to budge me. I gritted my teeth to ease the pain, and in my moment of agony, I locked his right leg which was still sticking against my left hip with my left hand.

With the remaining might I still had, I thrust my right fist twice rapidly toward his stomach and face, and then I spread my fist and use the valley between my thumb and index finger to strike his throat.

While he was choking, I swept his left foot where he was standing and

toppled him off. He collapsed on his left side, and finally I knocked him out by kicking the back of his head.

It took me longer than I imagined for fighting Rick. I breathed heavily and rapidly to calm myself. And hearing the blaring siren closing in distance gave me the warning to leave.

BLAM

I could hear a deafening gunshot being fired from close distance, but I couldn't see where it was fired from. Until suddenly I felt a warm pain spreading from my left shoulder.

[What?]

My heart starts to race, it's making me harder to turn around and see what hit me. I was barely able to keep standing anymore. If I don't move soon, he could shot me again with a fatal blow.

CRASH

Another noise, a staccato voice of something feeble smashed against something solid until the feeble something broke could be heard. Since I barely had the strength to look back, I did it very slowly.

Behind me was that girl, holding a bent wooden broomstick in her hands. I thought she had ran away, but it's a good thing that she had not.

I looked around, two unconscious body lying on the alley, bound to a deep forced sleep that I violently induced.

[Why do I know how to do this?]

[What am I?!]

Putting those questions aside, I thought I might had one answer. Behind me the girl who looked like the white figure that had been appearing within my dreams lately, she was standing timidly with a broken stick on her hand. She seemed terrified, but was also unwilling to leave.

“Sorry for the late introduction,” I said while half facing her, “call me Theodore, what's your name?”

“...” she pauses for a moment, “Vi... Vicky.”

“Well, Vicky...” my voice was getting lower and lower, competing with my breath that was getting heavier and heavier, “I think I need your help.”

History and Memory

22 June 2010

Mombasa Downtown

14.42

“Wha... what do you need me to do?”

“First, don't panic. Second, check on these men for their wallets and take them. And third, take me somewhere safe.”

This narrow back alley made the voice of the closing in siren in the distance to be louder than they were. Made it harder for me to estimate how much time we had until they arrived. My rough estimation, at least one to two minutes.

I approached Gyle's unconscious body and picked the gun lying next to him. I had to crouch to pick it, applying weight when I bent and made the pain in my wound felt sharper.

By the time I picked the handgun, Vicky had returned from examining Rick's pockets. In her hands were two wallets.

“Do you know a safe place?” I asked her with half breathing, still try to hold the pain.

“We have to get you to the hospital, the hospital is only five minutes—”

“No, no, not the hospital; I can't go to the hospital,” I complained, of course I can't go to such place. I can't risk of getting myself caught.

“...” she thought for a while. My request was illogical, but I had to. “We can hide in my house.”

“Where is it?”

“Forty minutes drive from here.”

“How do we reach there?”

“My car is across the street.”

“Okay, then. Let's take a detour, police might be coming.”

And so, Vicky and I traced the alleys. We needed to at least walk past four to five buildings until I felt was safe to return to the main street. At least I could relax, the hard part had passed. I didn't need to hurry to ask Vicky about her.

“Hah... haa...”

My breath felt so heavy, it got harder and harder to hold back the pain. I had to rest my shoulder on the nearest wall so that I won't collapse.

“You okay?” Vicky asked.

“No.”

“Do you need help? Let me carry you,” she continued while offering her left shoulder.

I didn't have much choices, I knew we had to get out from here immediately but I couldn't move fast on my own. So without hesitation, I accepted her offer.

Surely I wrapped my right arm around her neck. This would had been a good idea if she's taller, I had to crouch so my arm could rest nicely on her shoulders.

We could walk faster, despite my wound felt sore. My breath felt so heavy, and walking limping on the shoulder of someone shorter than me didn't help.

After walking for a moment in this position, we finally reached the streets. From here we could see police and civilians were swarming the store that was my battlefield. A few cars were parked in parallel across the store. If no one from that store remembered me or Vicky, then we could run off nicely.

I tried to walk as normal as I could, I let my hand off from Vicky's left shoulder and started walking straight and tall, but still awkward. Every step induced me to slouch so I didn't feel the pain on my shoulder.

At a point, Vicky walked through pass me and headed toward her car. She immediately unlocked the doors and let ourselves in, I sat on the front passenger seat.

The car was quite old, an old but cherished brown sedan with clean interior.

Soon Vicky started the engine, she played with the gear and shifted it, and upon releasing the handbrake, we got out from the parking space. I was surprised that she drove manual, but then again, automatic cars are expensive. This car might reflected her income.

My eyes were getting heavier. As we were at least safer now than before, I could let the sleepiness that I tried hard to postpone once again take over.

I stopped panting and instead exhale deeply every time I inhale short breath, trying to stabilise, but it's useless. With every calming breath, it also pushed me into chasm of unconsciousness. I knew I won't die from this scratch, so I stopped resisting and gave my body a rest it deserved.

“Theodore?”

“Theodore?”

“Theodore!”

From my right, I could hear someone calling me. It was Vicky, she was cheering me not to give in. But I couldn't, I need to rest.

“Don...t... worry...”

I could barely talk; I said that so weakly I couldn't even sure I said that through my mouth.

“Theodore!” she kept calling me, even with slightly shaking my right shoulder.

“...”

“_____?”

[*You...?*]

“...”

For a moment I was trapped inside the void, until slowly I regained my awareness, but still didn't have complete control over my own physical body. Here I was, back inside that room again.

I was sitting on the same chair behind a wooden desk, but the black figure which called itself as ‘Graille Einhorn’ had been waiting for me to open my eyes.

He was standing across the desk while holding a Riesling glass, and on the desk itself was a bottle and another empty Riesling glass.

While waiting for me to be fully aware, he raised his glass and savour the aroma of the wine he had poured into the glass and then swirling the content slowly. I didn't know he was connoisseur and/or sommelier.

“Oh, welcome back,” he greeted me.

[*Wha—*]

Again, I was not the one he talked to nor I was the one to talk. I was just a bystander on the shoes of the second person.

“Doctor Einhorn!”

“Good day, ———.”

“Sorry, did I fall asleep?”

“Don't worry, it is fine.”

“Has it's been two weeks already?”

“Time flies, doesn't it?”

“ ... ”

“Care for a drink?”

“You know I shouldn't.”

I looked at the glossy wine bottle standing on the desk in front of me. If I could actually enjoy it, I might try to resist my own voice and accept.

“Are you sure? No one will care if you do.”

“I'm sure.”

“Fine then,” he raised his glass and drank the content without hesitation. After he emptied the glass, he put the glass on the desk and wandered around in across the table slowly with both of his hand crossed behind his back. “So, for the first month, how are you progressing?”

“Slowly, Sir.”

I knew this would sound odd, but I just realised that within my voice, my

ethereal voice, every time it spoke, is the tone of respect. As if we were close.

“...” he paused, I could detect a hint of disappointment in his silence. “But you are now able control it, right?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“So you have seen the potential of this program.”

“...”

“Don't worry, the others had told me.”

“The others, Sir?”

“The ones before you— nevermind,” he stopped abruptly then choked himself with a cough, “would you mind telling me what you have done so far?”

“...”

“Have you try levitation?”

“Heheh...”

“So you have.”

“Yes, it was the first thing I tried.”

“Go on.”

“I mean, it was amazing, I can do anything. I can create anything I want.”

On his non-existent face, I could feel that Einhorn was smiling, even if right now he was giving me his back. I didn't know what it actually meant, but I was guessing satisfaction.

“But, Sir...”

“Yes?” he turned around, now showing me his non-existent face.

“I am still failing to see the purpose of this program.”

“I don't think you are ready to see the picture,” he said while rubbing his face with his left hand.

“Sir—”

“I know how bad you want to know, but now is not your time. Believe me,

your time will come when you are ready, and you will be ready when you reach the point I need you to be.”

“... ”

“You know what I'm talking; you flied, you created... but all of those are just the beginning.”

I didn't know what to say. Just like my ethereal self, I was baffled and unable to respond. But I knew that what we were thinking must be exactly the same; “*what is he saying?*”

“Trust me, the ultimate purpose of this program is to change the world.”

““*Change the world*”?”

“Yes, remember when I told you how I don't like how this world works? You will be the one to change it,” he spoke in high and exuberant tone.

“*You can't be serious, Sir... Me? Change the world?*”

“Well, not now,” he continued, but this time slowly losing the vigorous tone he had earlier. “But you will when we are done.”

I shook my head slowly, not in disagreement nor in scepticism, but in awe. At least that was how I remembered what I felt when I had this conversation. But in hindsight, I thought I was now shaking my head in pity.

“While we are still working, we—”

BZZT

“Wha...”

Suddenly something happened, the black figure of Graille Einhorn and everything else inside this room started to glitch; the figure, the wine bottle, the glasses, the table, and the desk, but not me. I looked at the both of my hands, and I didn't see any changes in my physique.

All the objects in front of me glitched horizontally and gradually fades away, meanwhile as it was happening, the room itself glitched vertically and slowly began to materialise something; walls, floors, ceiling, and lights.

The infinite room was now enclosed with finite walls, one in each directions.

But not just that, the walls began to form a set of corridors. Something felt very familiar with these walls; they were made of thick metal, the surface was scrubbed clean. The ceilings were basically the extension of the walls, and the floors were reinforced with concrete, but also covered with bluish marble that matches the walls.

[Am I supposed to follow these corridors?]

Since I didn't see any other options, I began to walk and trace the corridors. Strange, these corridors were just walls, despite their length that suggested that there was a room inside each wall, there was no doors. And they didn't seem to stretch endlessly, but I couldn't see its end either, as if the corridors just ceased to exist after a certain point. From where I stood, I thought there was a distance between me and the end of the corridors where this place exist.

One, two, three intersections I passed. Randomly and alternatingly chose between right, left, or walking just straight until I lost track how far I had walked. And after I walked that distance, the only thing I found was silence.

BLAM

Suddenly, a gunshot noise echoed through the narrow corridors, the reverberation that slowly transferring through the walls made it easy to triangulate where the sound was coming from, but the reduced volume made it hard to know the exact distance. From my estimation, the gunshot originated from a few intersections to my right.

My curiosity pushed me to find the source, it was enough to make me start to run. I rushed myself as fast as I could towards the place where I guessed the gunshot was coming from. I kept running straight in the corridor in front of me while scanning every right turn I passed. I didn't find anything in the first and second turns, but the sight of the third right turn shocked me.

Upon reaching the third right turn, I almost ran through, but something caught my attention. A several intersections from this turn, I could see the end of the corridors. And before it ended, three figures, two wearing pale black uniform were lying unconscious while the other one was standing, looking at them with a gun which muzzle was still smoking in his right hand, but that was not what shocked me the most. It was the fact that the standing figure's appearance was

exactly like me.

Unlike before the glitch, when the people-like figures were monotonous in single colour, this time the figure that I was seeing was really lifelike. His black short messy cut hair that is like of mine, his thin but brawny posture just like mine, they unmistakably resemble me.

Seeing this scene caused my breath to accelerate, even my lungs felt as if an external force was forcefully squeezing them like a squish toy. And as if it weren't bad enough, slowly the standing figure began to raise his face towards me.

[What the hell...]

I could see his face clearly, even from this distance, I could be totally sure that that figure was me. Even if these last three days I'd never seen a mirror, I knew exactly how he was me.

For a couple of seconds we exchanged looks, and it felt so surreal. His expression was not as sharp looking as me, but he was far calmer than I was now, as if I was seeing myself in a mirror but my reflection refused to match my expressions.

[What should I do?]

[What should I do?!]

Repeatedly I asked myself for instruction, but I was too petrified to move my own legs. But it surprised me that I got the answer for that question from someone else.

“Run...”

I couldn't hear him saying it, but from this distance, I could still read him moving his lips. Soon after he whispered that, he started running, dashing into the corridor to his right. And it didn't take me long before I found out why.

From behind me, I could hear the pitter-patter of rushing footsteps. But odd, when I turned my head around, all I find is just a solid metal wall; the end of the corridor. Slowly as I turned my head around again, I could see right beside me two figures wearing pale black uniform was lying unconscious on the floor; I'd

been shifted from where I was.

Now that I'd returned my sight forward, I realised four things; first that there was a team of four fully armed soldiers with body armours and automatic rifles were rushing towards me. Second, I noticed that there was a hole that looked like it was opened by a shot from a huge cannon on the wall to my left, that apparently leads to nowhere, just a pitch black huge void. Third, just right after my position shifted, I had lost my 'Theodore Quentin' jacket. And fourth, I was holding a gun in my right hand.

[What am I doing here?!]

[Why is this gun in my hand?!]

[Who are those soldiers?!]

[What hole is this?!]

I was totally perplexed, unable to comprehend the babel I was in. But seeing how the soldiers had slowed down and secured the corridor, I remembered what the other me said, I knew that this was the time I had to scurry.

Actually I wanted to run to my left, but I didn't know why I ran to my right instead. I went toward exactly the same direction as the other me was running toward. So far, I could handle myself in front of small guns, but seeing heavy guns like those soldiers were carrying scared me. I will not deal with those.

Aimlessly I ran through the corridor that seemed to be endless. Once and twice I looked behind in case they were coming after me. So far, I couldn't see anyone. But when I looked forward again, the sight in front of me compelled me to stop.





In front of me, another batch of soldiers in the same number was approaching fast. Seeing that, I immediately stopped and turned around, I needed to find another way to escape them.

I turned around frantically, almost losing my footing, but I managed to recover and re-stabilise my running pace. Since I knew I won't lose them if I move straight, I took a left turn in the next intersection, but there was something already waiting for me there.

Just when I took the turn, right in front of me was another team of soldiers, but now there were only three of them. They were almost taking the turn into the corridor where I was, might be about to flank me.

Both parties, me and them, were equally surprised, but I recovered faster. They were holding their guns with both of their hands, this gave me an advantage. I was more prepared to engage in close combat than they were.

Swiftly, I swung my right hand and punch the face of the leftmost of the soldiers with the gun I was holding. He was knocked leftward, but still not enough to make him fall, so I continued with punching his face with my left fist.

He still refused to fall. Meanwhile from my right, the other two soldiers were distancing away from me while raising their firearms. They were preparing to fire and I was in hard position to dodge. There was only one thing I could do.

The soldier I just punched, still recovering, I tackled his left leg with mine in order to trip him. Before he could fall to his knee, I grabbed the neckline of his body armour and dragged him rightward, shielding myself from the other two's aiming line.

DRA-DA-DA-DA-DAT

Just in nick of time, the other two pulled their triggers. Since I was covering myself behind the body of a soldier wearing body armour and the other two were focusing their fire at my torso, I survived.

They stopped firing because they knew they weren't hitting me. This was the chance I could take. I charged toward them and pushed the soldier closest to me with the meat shield I was holding. My charge wasn't strong, only as strong as a charging cat, but since I let my grip off from him when I clashed, his body

weight made the other soldier fall trying to support him.

Releasing my body shield made me vulnerable to be shot by the last soldier, so I immediately jumped to my right and aimed my handgun. I did not aim for the fatal shot that I could easily get if I shoot him right to his neck or even face, but instead I tried to disable him.

DRA-DA-DA-DA-DAT

While I was still moving, both of us tried to aim at each other. He tried to aim anywhere he thought he could hit from my body while moving his firing range at me. Meanwhile I aimed at his right hand, which was considerably harder.

BLAM

Before he could move his gun to fire at me, I pulled my handgun's trigger. The bullet fired from my gun's muzzle, while my wrist was still trying to suppress the recoil, the bullet went through the soldier's trigger, hitting him right in his right index finger. Despite him being incapacitated from shooting anymore, I needed to make sure that he won't recover. So I shot his left thigh.

As I recovered my footing, I realised that the soldier who I threw my meat shield at was still struggling to remove his friend's body of him. I shot his left thigh and his right hand to incapacitate him.

This fight made me completely forgot about the other soldiers that were coming from the other corridor. I turned around because I sensed a presence was already staring at me. But what I found behind me was not the soldiers, I still could hear their footsteps.

Across the corridor behind me, the other me was standing and watching how I fight, his grey shirt was drenched in blood, but not his blood.

Seeing his presence made me disregard the incoming soldiers. While I was still fixing my eyes toward the other me, the four soldiers had positioned themselves between me and the other me and prepared their arms to fire.

“Fire! Fire!”

I was too preoccupied to react, the next thing I knew was that they had unleashed a barrage of bullets onto me which I couldn't evade.

“HAH!”

Right before that wall of bullets hit me, I woke up. While still trying to calm myself, I tried to observe my environment. I woke up in an unfamiliar place, on a couch of a tidy studio apartment, a coffee table where a netbook was sitting still, a dining table with three chairs, and a small television set that looked almost a decade old.

“Theo... dore...”

I heard someone was calling me, soon I realised that my right hand was grabbing tightly onto something. I traced my shoulder towards my wrist until I saw that my right hand was strangling someone's neck.

“Vicky?”

I noticed that her hands were grabbing my wrist, hoping that they will prevent my right hand from crushing her neck.

Immediately I let my grip off from her, and the second I did that, she gasped and coughed painfully trying to catch air. I didn't know that my grip was that strong.

“I'm so sorry...” I apologised while still trying to calm myself and stabilise my breath.

Slowly my senses were recovering, supporting my upper body on my left elbow made my left shoulder felt hurt that I let my body fall onto the couch while groaning over the pain I felt.

I moved my right hand to feel my left shoulder, my hand did not touch the texture of my shirt, my clothes had been removed. And I didn't feel my skin either, but instead it touched the texture of a cloth. My wound had been treated.

“Don't!” Vicky yelled with raspy voice while still gasping for air.

Funny, hearing her warning made me want to check on my wound to see how bad it was. But before I could assess the damage on my left shoulder, she grabbed my right elbow and pulled it away so my hand couldn't reach my left shoulder.

“Your wound wasn't fatal, I've treated it as best as I could.”

It wasn't yet a day since I walked on land again, and I got involved in a technical kidnapping. Since my head felt so heavy, I tried to ease myself to reduce the pain. Vicky thought I was trying to stand so she stopped me, but when she saw me only to raise my head angle, she refrained.

From this couch where I was lying and her sitting on the other end, I could see the window. Outside the window of this apartment was the blue sky with a shade of orange, meaning that now is afternoon.

I tried to look around and double check, but this time I remembered that earlier Vicky said that we could hide in her place.

“Hey,” I said softly, “is this your home?”

“Yes.”

“Why do you help me?”

“Because you saved me,” she said stating the obvious that I had forgotten, “aside from that I don't know, maybe because I think you are in some kind of trouble.”

Well, that was true. I saved her and I was a man in need of help. But I never thought I would be rescued by someone that has nothing to do with my troubles at all.

[Wait, that may not be true.]

“Wait, Vicky...”

“Yes?”

“Do you have a little sister?”

“Little sister?”

“Or do you know someone by the name of Eve.”

I remembered from a dream earlier today. I remembered that that white figure mentioned she knew someone she called ‘Eve’. If Vicky was indeed the white figure then might as well ask her now.

“...” she thought for a while, she stuck her right index finger on her chin and stared the ceiling while she thinks. “I... don't think so.”

[*Huh...*]

I sighed, I was jumping to conclusions and got my hopes up. I risked my life to save her for nothing; she was not the white figure in my dreams. Back to square one, but at least she was alive and she saved me. It was still a win.

“Nevermind, then.”

“...”

“By the way, how do you know how to treat this kind of wound?”

“Oh, I am a nurse.”

“I see...”

That was some luck, I never thought I would meet a nurse in this kind of situation. It was practical, or else I will need to go to the hospital which was not the best thing to do.

“Uhh... Theodore...” she called my name timidly, just like what I did earlier. With this kind of tone, she must be dying to ask one or two questions about me.

“What is it?”

“Are you a...” she paused, as if she didn't know how to put her curiosity into words.

“...A criminal?”

I knew what she had to say, I was just helping her to put it into words since it must be hard for someone as subtle as her.

“Tha— that is not what was going to say—”

“Don't worry, I understand. And no, I am not a criminal.”

“...” she paused, “then, who are you?”

There was the dreaded question, the question which answer I myself needed to know. I wouldn't be here if I knew the answer myself.

“To be honest, I don't know.”

“Huh?”

“I need to know the answer to that question, too. I am suffering some kind of

amnesia, I couldn't remember anything prior from three days ago.”

“What happened three days ago?”

“I can't say for sure, three days ago I was found on the ocean by a fishing boat, they thought I might be stranded from another boat. They picked me up and say that some ‘rescue party’ will be waiting for me once we land in Mombasa...”

“ ... ”

While I was talking, she watched and listened for every word I said quietly. Even when I paused, apart from the sound of indistinct afternoon traffic outside, I could hear the voice the clock that mounted on the wall above the couch ticking every second.

“But when I landed on Mombasa, what I found was not a ‘rescue party’. It was a capture team.”

“ ... ”

“They captured me but I managed to break free. Then I thought maybe I could get some information from them, I thought I was about to be taken to the place where they supposed to deliver me. Maybe I could see someone who knows who I am there, but I was wrong. Instead the driver crashed his car and tried to secure me again. And then that is where I met you.”

“You've been through a lot.”

“Hmm... yeah.”

Hearing that, she's exhaled a deep breath and rise. Perhaps she felt reassured knowing that she was not harbouring some kind of criminal.

She packed the first aid kit on the table beside the other end of the couch and put it on the kitchen. I thought about helping her, but remembering how she almost forbid me from fixing my back, I refrained.

“Wait,” she exclaimed from the kitchen, “then how do you know your name?”

[Right, I haven't told her that.]

“Oh, that is different. By the way where is my jacket?”

“It is on the dining chair, why?”

“I was found on the ocean wearing that, that jacket have a name sewed onto it; ‘Theodore Quentin.’ Since there is no any other clue about my identity, I think that might be my name.”

“What about what you said earlier,” she returned from the kitchen with a slender glass of water on her right hand which she brought for me, “about if I know someone named Eve?”

“That one is complicated,” I said as I received the glass of water she brought me, “thanks.”

“You can tell me, maybe I can help.”

“...” I stared at her for a while upon finished gulping the water and putting the empty glass onto the coffee table in front of the couch. “Well, so after my amnesia, I frequently dream about my memories. They are both vivid and vague, vivid because I could remember everything I see from that dream, but vague because everything I see inside that dream is incomplete.”

“I see,” she smiled, as if she understood my condition, which was why seeing her smile like that make me skeptical.

“What?”

“You know, I have some experience with amnesia patient.”

“You have?”

“Yes, and in cases like yours, the doctor usually recommends the patient to write a journal.”

“A journal?”

“Yes, so you can keep track of everything you remember. From there you will recognise some memory pattern that leads to your brain recovery.”

I tried to think about it for a while. Neurologically speaking, that is methodical; it might seem insignificant, but by training myself to recognise that memory pattern, I might trigger other memories to emerge. To be honest, I didn't think it's a bad plan.

“That sounds like a good idea, I will try that.”

After walking around for a while, she checked the clock on the wall and suddenly she looked flustered. “Oh, look at the time. I have to go.”

“Huh?”

“I have a night shift,” she explained while grabbing her car key on the table on the other side of the couch.

But to think again about the plan, I remembered that I didn't have any cash to buy an empty book. Also since I got shot, I will need a new shirt. It was obvious that I couldn't ask if Vicky had any spare items in her wardrobe.

[*Wait, didn't we...*]

“Vicky...”

“Yes?”

“Uhh, what about my gun or those men's wallets you picked up?”

“Oh, yes. They are on the dining table.”

“Have you checked what is inside the wallets?”

“No, why?”

“Can you take a look inside of them?”

“Okay.”

She put her car keys on the table again and walked toward her dining table where two wallets were lying. She took one and checked inside, but after seeing the content of the wallet, her expression changed.

“What is it?”

“There is a quite sum of cash here.”

“How much?”

“A lot.”

All right, then I didn't have any trouble. With that money I could get what I need.

“Can you take that money and get me a book and a shirt? You can keep the rest.”

“Hmm, okay,” she took the wad of cash out and put it on her pocket then returned towards the table where she put her car keys and head for the door. “I will be back after midnight, are you okay being here alone?”

“I'm fine. Thanks,” looking at her netbook on the coffee table makes me think I might as well spend the leisure time I had to do research for what I already knew. “Also...”

“Yes?” my call made her stop to close the door when she about to exit. She stood on the threshold, looking at me from half-open door.

“Can I use your netbook?”

“Uhh... fine.”

“Once again, thanks.”

“...sure”

She proceeded to close the door without saying anything and ceased to be heard, but I still could hear her short-paced footsteps in the corridors though.

Soon after she went out, I figured I had nothing else to do. There wasn't much choice inside this apartment, despite there was a television remote beside the netbook. I chose to reach for the netbook.

[*Knoweth thine enemy.*]

I didn't remember where I heard that, but if I wanted to survive this, I needed to know who I was opposing.

I booted the netbook up and logged in into her password unprotected terminal. I checked if she had internet connection before opening the web browser. I clicked into a well-known search engine and input a string of name into its form.

[*Graille Einhorn.*]

In a keypress of return key, the search result loaded in a matter of seconds, the search engine estimated at least millions of search result for this string. Knowing

how search engines worked, I bet 80% of those search results were irrelevant. The topmost result was a wiki article, clicking the blue link leads me into the records of summary about him.

The article contains much information, but many were unrelated with my situation. Also there was not a picture of him inside the article, but I supposed there aren't many Graille Einhorns in this Earth.

Doctor Grailleus Thaedei Ambroise Einhorn is a renowned philanthropist and humanitarian. In 1991 he founded the Einhorn Foundation. Years later, his foundation had developed and by now it has branch offices and research facilities in many countries. The Einhorn Foundation is where he works many technological breakthroughs which include exoskeleton for the physically disabled and cerebral therapy machine that able to cure Alzheimer's. Basically he works in the name of humanity.

This didn't fit my situation, though I knew in some of my memories I was talking with him like we were very close. Maybe we were working on something together.

[After knowing your opponent, know thyself.]

Again, I didn't remember where I heard that, but it was still relevant to my current situation.

I clicked 'back' in the web browser tab where article of Graille Einhorn was and it loaded the search result page. I blocked the string in the search form and change it by typing another string. This time I typed a different name.

[Theodore Quentin.]

Upon pressing the return key, the search result loaded swiftly. This time the search engine estimated a significant lesser search results; only about tens of thousands.

The results in the first page were mostly social media profiles and blogs. I tried to check each result. I would be lucky if the result page includes a photo, that way I could verify my identity, but after checking the first search result page and no profile matched me, I gave up.

I closed all the tabs except for the search result page, there was still another

thing that I needed to make sure.

I erased the search string and input a new one, this one might be the key of everything.

[Aircraft accident Graille Einhorn.]

With an intense doubt, I pressed the return key. I held my breath and swallowed air while waiting the search engine doing its work. The search results appeared quickly, the result appeared made me sigh reassuringly. A big sigh.

[Search returned 0 results.]

But I had to be sure, the search string I entered was too specific. Maybe I had to manually find the information I needed with a more generic keywords.

Again, I overwrote the search string and typed a new one. This time I tried to make it more general.

[Recent aircraft accidents.]

With a press on the 'Enter' key, the result page returned a quite sum of results. This time the search engine estimated hundreds of thousands of results. I read the search snippets, most of them were coming from online news magazines.

After a lot of reading, I concluded that there were only about two aircraft accidents happened in the past month, but none of them happened near Mombasa or involving Graille Einhorn. But even then, I still could not be sure. There was a part of me saying that the truth was still hidden somewhere.

Because regardless of what the recorded history says, what I knew from my memory was more reliable. And that is what makes history and memory have different value.

Since I didn't want to play some card games or chess, I closed the web browser and logged off from her terminal then shut it down. Also because I was still feeling sore, I wanted to sleep. But remembering my last dream, I was afraid I will see the same dream.

From this couch, I could see a bookshelf next to the bathroom door. But all I could see in it was medical books which were not an interesting reading for me.

I needed to find a way to pass time, but since I didn't have any more options,

ultimately I chose to rest even if I will have to see that dream again.

It seemed every time I get one answer, I also get two more new questions that need to be answered.

I lowered my body and rest my head on the couch's armrest. I made a big sigh and closed my eyes, hoping that I will just get some rest.

With my eyes closed, the stillness of this room and the indistinct voices of the outside world made me feel sleepy. I fell asleep faster than I wanted to.

After falling asleep for a few moments, I returned into that same room again. This time I was continuing my interrupted last session with Graille Einhorn. Everything in it was nothing of importance at all, he was just telling me about the importance of 'the program' before he disappeared and left me alone in disintegrating room.

When that session was over, I was able to sleep quietly. My slumber was not peaceful, but overall it was a good rest. Hours passed before I woke up, the next thing I know, when I woke up, everything is dark.

It took me a while to be accustomed in darkness, the light that came from outside was enough to make me able to see in dark.

I take a look around, there were small differences between the scene before I fell asleep and after I woke up, apart from the darkness. First, Vicky's netbook was no longer on the coffee table, and second was that the door to Vicky's room was closed, not like what I remembered before I fell asleep. So she had returned. And lastly was that there was a brand new grey shirt, neatly folded under a brown leather covered book that almost looked like a diary.

I rose and examined the new objects, I moved the book away and took the grey shirt. I unfolded and wore it over the bandage that wrapped my wound. When I was wearing the shirt, I noticed something odd about my torso. Somehow my right lower chestal area looked different with the left one. The shirt feels a little bit tight even for my thin and slender posture, but it fit.

Next I examined the book, I opened the button lock and turned the cover. There was a pen neatly set in the binding. Since I did not feel sleepy anymore, I chose to write on it right away.

I leaned closer to the left side of the couch, where I slept, because there was a table lamp standing on the small table beside it. I turned the lamp on so now I had a source of light. And after I took the pen out from the binding, I was ready to write what I had recalled.

For the rest of the night, I spent the time by writing all my dreams into the book. Maybe I took it very seriously perhaps, I didn't even realise that at one point I fell asleep writing. The next thing I knew, it was morning.

“Theodore?”

[Who?]

Slowly I opened my heavy eyes and raised my spirit that had seemingly plunged into sleep once more. I fell asleep on my knees with the book still lying on my lap, leaving an unfinished note on its paper surface.

“Good morning.”

On the other side of the couch was Vicky. She was handing a plate with a sandwich on it. Still unable to cope with the changed time, I awkwardly accepted.

“Here, you must be hungry.”

“Good morning,” I responded late, “and thanks.”

“So, how is it?”

“Huh?”

“Your journal.”

“It is good. Thanks.”

“May I?”

“...sure.”

She took the book away from the floor which had fallen when I woke up. While I was eating the sandwich she gave me, she read the contents of my writing seriously

Almost with every mouthful I swallowed she turned the book page, seeing how many pages had been turned so far surprised me. I did wrote that much?

“Theodore?”

“Yeah?”

“What is in India?”

She pointed at an entry I wrote, it was written in capitals and bigger than the other texts, it occupied four lines with several underlines and circled because of its importance. It read only one word; India.

I swallowed another mouthful that only half chewed before I put the unfinished sandwich and its plate on the coffee table before then I started to address her query.

“There is one thing that I have to ask you beforehand, though.”

“What is it?”

“If I say this, you might think that I am a villain or something, but I don't know if it is true,” I explain intensely, “so I must ask you, will you still trust me even if there is a possibility that I might be evil?”

“...what does that—”

“Please, just answer the question.”

“Sure, I will still trust you.”

“ ... ”

It was still surprising me how many people kept putting blind faith on me. I knew, I thought I liked it. But I was afraid that if one day she would discover the truth, and then I can never look her in the eyes again.

“When I was found, I heard they said that I am responsible for crashing an aircraft.”

I could see a change of expression on Vicky's face; a hint of terror that was being hold back.

“So, did you—”

“I told you, I don't know,” I averted my eyes from her, but I was still talking to her with intense and serious tone. “But yesterday I tried to look if there is an aircraft accident happened recently.”

“And?”

“I didn't find any that I might have been involved in.”

“...” she didn't respond, knowing this maybe she wanted to retract her promise.

“So how is it? Do you still trust me?” I asked after returning my eyes on her.

“...” she blinked several times, her face was noticeably pale, “If— if there is nothing you find that links you to what they say about you, I suppose then you maybe didn't do that. I still trust you.”

“Thanks.”

I was glad that this time I didn't rely on blind faith/ I was happy that I could provide some facts for her to trust on.

“By the way, why didn't you just wake me up last night?” I continued.

“Ah!”

Suddenly she gasped and rose, as if she had forgotten something important, even she dropped my journal.

“What is it?”

“I forgot that I couldn't stay for the morning, I have day shift for today.”

She frantically rushed towards her room and prepared her stuffs. I didn't see her again until she suddenly dashes out from her room.

“How about the shirt?”

“Huh?”

After a moments of silence, she continued by starting small talk. I didn't hate it, but suddenly changing topic like that made me slightly confused.

“The shirt.”

“Oh, that... you chose a good one.”

She only smiled to my answer. And after pausing she proceeded to take her car keys and hastily ran outside.

This time I refused to just sit still. I rose and I found out that my wound was

not as sore as yesterday. I approached the window behind the dining table and from there I could see Vicky just exited the building. Also from here, I just realised that her apartment was on the second level.

She didn't realise that I was watching her, even until she drove away. Soon after she disappeared into the traffic, I moved back from the window, I didn't know why but looking outside the window gave me ominous feeling.

I looked around, I noticed that I haven't finished my sandwich on the coffee table. I returned to the couch and finished my breakfast. After I finished eating, I took the plate into the kitchen and washed it. There was very little for me to do. Eventually, I chose to return to the couch and continued writing my journal.

Up until noon I continued writing until finally I finished writing everything I could recall up to the last thing into my journal; the time I got rescued to Dasan's ship, my first dream about Graille Einhorn, my first encounter with the white figure, the time I stopped a storm, the time I got kidnapped, and until the time I got here.

Not everything I knew went into the book. There is a piece of memory that I left out; the dream I had before I woke up in this place. That one was too grim I don't want to remember it at all.

After I finished writing the journal, I lied down on the couch and tried another nap again. I was afraid if I have too much rest, my body will get slow. But the reason why I needed some rest was because the tiring frustration I get from thinking how could I get to India. I didn't have the money, and on top of that, I didn't even have a passport.

Putting that aside, I was also thinking about Vicky. If she was not the white figure in my dreams, then who was that white figure?

When I was asleep, I didn't visually see any dream at all. I only heard voices. This time the voices were soothing. It was the sound of content laugh. Even with such pleasant voices, this was not the best rest I had. It's because every once and then, I saw glimpses of my memory, some were from the dream where I fought those soldiers, and the rest were from the night where I was floating on the ocean.

The glimpses finally forced me to wake up, and when I woke up, I realised

that it was almost night again. I looked at the clock above the couch, its hands were pointing at 19.09.

It was almost nightfall and Vicky had yet to return. I wondered if she had to work overtime.

I rose from the couch and tried to walk around, I refrained from turning on the lights since apparently I had grown accustomed in the dark. This might sound strange, but I felt a lot safer without lights.

After walking around in a circle for a while, I approached the window. From the window behind the dining table that faces the streets, I could see the road was barely filled with traffic. Even the pedestrians were not many. I could count the current passerbys by finger.

Since I was feeling ominous again, I moved away from the window. At least after three steps walking backward, I got lined with the other window that faces the alley, across that window was another apartment. This window is mounted parallel with a window from that apartment.

What I saw behind their window fills me with riddles. I could see a father and his daughter sitting on a same chair, reading a book, maybe he was reading a story for her. While I could see the atmosphere inside their residence, they couldn't realise my intrusion for the lack of light in this room. I couldn't make of what the book they are reading, but seeing them bonding like that made my heart moved.

What I felt was not 'I wish I have that' neither 'how it must be nice to be there.' I felt like I've never had the chance to feel such luxury, while at the same time, I also felt like I was never alone. It just didn't feel right.

As I averted my vision and sighed deeply, I could feel my body was cramping. I tried to bend my back backward to get rid of it but it didn't work. Too much resting does this. I needed to move more.

Knowing Vicky won't be back soon, I figured I might take a stroll on the neighbourhood before she returns.

I approached one of three dining chairs that set across the window, where Vicky put my jacket and wore it. Even if it was still dusk, I knew it will be cold

soon. And then I checked on the other wallet that Vicky hadn't touched. I found a small amount of money. I took some of the money out and put the wallet back on the table.

After that, I approached the coffee table and opened my journal. Since I didn't know when Vicky will be back, I figured I should write a note. I took the pen out and rip a piece of paper out of its binding. After putting the piece of paper on the coffee table surface, I began to scratch some letters on it.

[Taking a walk, be back soon.]

I made the writing as clear I as could, twice the height of a single line the paper provide to make sure she will see this memo. Then, I put the pen back into my journal and used the journal as a weight so my note didn't get blown.

After I made sure she will see this note in case she returned before I get back, I rose and walked toward the door. Outside apartment's door was a stairwell. I turned rightward and turned left when the corridor ended until I reached a set of stairs that led downward. From there was just a straight hall until I reached the front door.

Upon exited the building, I scanned the streets and tried to remember it so I don't miss it when I return. There was no street name marker that I could read nearby, so I will have to truly memorise this place.

This place was very quiet, knowing how many pedestrians passing through this street on day,. I could even count the people I was seeing around herewith one hand.

There was a man wearing a flat top hat who was waiting in the alley at least thirty meters away on my left. There were two wearing dark blue and brown jumpers with their hood on walking and chatting across the street, and there was a policeman patrolling at least twenty meters to my right.

Seeing enough and feeling I had memorised this street, I started to walk to my right and crossed the street into the lesser part of the street. Still,being out in the open like this gave me a looming feeling.

I kept walking for a while and savour the night scene of Mombasa. I knew this was not the best part of the city to see at night, but I couldn't afford to

wander too far.

I walked aimlessly while keeping track of the direction I took so I knew which way I should take to return to Vicky's apartment. I was walking for about fifteen minutes before I felt thirsty.

About five minutes later I saw a convenience store across the street I was walking on. I crossed the road and got inside the convenience store, I walked past the store clerk and the snack stand to approach the refrigerator. I didn't see anything that I felt will satisfy me along the way, except in the beverages refrigerator in the end of the room.

I browsed in front of it for a while, looking for a beverage that I thought I will like since I didn't remember having tried any of these drinks. But after lingering for a moment, I settled for a black cola inside a transparent plastic bottle.

I opened the cooler's glass door, a thin steaming cold mist pouring out from the cooler when I was taking the drink of my choice. The bottle felt warm when I took it out, but after a while, its temperature starts to adjust and it began to feel cold.

After I was sure that this was the drink I wanted, I brought it towards the store clerk and had it priced. I paid for it and immediately walked out from the store.

Outside the convenience store, I started to open the drink I just bought. The hissing voice it produced as I opened the bottle made me stopped opening it for a while, letting the air from outside to circulate with the air from inside the bottle before I continued, afraid that the content of the bottle would explode.

I opened the bottle and held the cap, with the help from my left hand, I drank the content of the bottle. I felt the soda bites the insides of my mouth before I gulped it. It was a little bit painful, but I had to repeat it again three times until I didn't feel thirsty anymore.

It only took half of the content of the bottle to satisfy my thirst, and since I didn't want to bother carrying the unfinished drink when I walk, I throw it into a trash can in front of the convenience store and continued walking.

I took the path leftward from the convenience store. I kept walking until the street ends and I had to turn left. That turn led to another street. There was still

not much to see here, so I kept walking until I reached an intersection.

From the intersection, I took another turn left. This intersection had some car passing on it, but it still felt deserted under the night. Even as I walked on it, there were only at least four cars passed in both directions.

As I walked on this street and the other streets I passed in the last half hour, I kept feeling this unshakable ominous feeling. I could sense a threat nearby, but I couldn't point out what was it exactly. As I took another turn left when the street intersected with another road, I could say for sure what was distracting me even from when I looked outside from Vicky's apartment's window for the first time.

After taking three consecutive left turns, I had circled the block. This proved one thing, there were two men following me from behind in at least thirty meters away from me. They did good tailing me, they had kept their distance and acted discreetly, almost not taking any attention.





I knew I needed to see who my tails are, but I couldn't do it directly or they will know that I had spotted them. It was hard to look behind without turning back.

When I completed my lap and reach the street where the convenience store was, there was a convex mirror staged in the corner of the street that is used to check if there is a car coming from behind the bend. With it, I could catch a glimpse of my tails.

Those two men were the same men I saw when I exited Vicky's apartment, they are the exact same men wearing the dark blue and the brown jumpers. If they had followed me from the very beginning, then they knew about Vicky.

I had brought this upon her, if I stayed any longer with her, she will be in danger. I will need to warn her.

When retracing my way home, I tried to walk inconspicuously. I needed to hide the fact that I had realised the presence of my tails. The hard part was to hold back the urge to run so I could warn Vicky soon.

After another half of an hour walking, I finally reached Vicky's apartment. In front of the building, I could see her car was parked. So she had returned home.

I entered the apartment and ascended the stairs until I reached the second level, where her apartment is. Without ignoring the fact that there might be a third person who was assigned to watch over the place, I approached the apartment door slowly until I was close enough to open it.

KNOCK KNOCK

Instead of opening it myself, I choose to knock and make sure that there was no surprise waiting for me inside.

CLICK

For about five seconds I waited for answer, but there was no respond from the other side. Instead the door handle started to spin and the door started to open.

“Theodore!”

I was expecting the worst before I see the one standing behind the threshold. I

was very relieved to see it was Vicky. She looked deeply concerned, her expression made me hard to say what I had to tell her.

“Where have you be—”

Without saying anything, I barged in and pushed her inside, even stopped her from talking. When I entered her apartment, there was one difference inside between now and before I left it; the lights have been turned on, this is the first time I was seeing this place in this state.

“Shh.”

“Wha— what is it?”

[This will be hard.]

“First, I am sorry I have brought this onto you.”

“What are you talking about?”

Frantically, I left Vicky who was looking confused and approach the window. They hadn't found out that I knew about them, so I tried to act casual while I looked out from the window. I didn't look at those two men directly, with my face gazing straight from the window and my eyes rolled to their direction, I could see them standing at the corner of the street.

“I don't know how, but this place has been marked.”

“Huh?!”

I moved back from the window before I continued, even if they could see us through this window, I had to make them unable to see what we were talking about.

“There were two men following me when I was out, right now they are watching this place.”

“Wha— what do you mean?”

“Again, I am very sorry,” I said in intense and serious tone, “but we have to leave this place.”

Tails

24 June 2010

Vicky's apartment

07.21

Time passed and slipped through my fingers after the event of last night, the next thing I knew was that morning had come. Unlike Vicky who spent her night resting, I on other hand spent the night awake. With a gun in my hand, I sat all night on the couch with blank stare, but while also listening for every detail I could hear, like the sound of Vicky's neighbour upstairs descending the stairs just about fifteen minutes ago.

What I was afraid of was, if those men suddenly barged in and capture Vicky and me. That was why I was up for the rest of the night; to guard this apartment and to protect her from any kind of threat.

“We have to leave this place!”

“No!”

Last night, Vicky and I had an argument, our argument despite intense, was quiet. That was because we didn't want to alert anyone. Explicitly, I admitted that I was responsible for this, but she kept refusing the solution I proposed.

“I don't know even if I leave, are they going to follow me or not. If I was not here, I couldn't guarantee your safety.”

“What about me?! I have a live here!”

“I know, but who knows what they will do to you if they catch you.”

“Fine! You could go by yourself then I will just tell the police that my house is stalked by some suspicious men. That will solve it, won't it?”

“No, it will not. That is not good enough, I need you to come with me.”

I was desperate, I admit it. Even if she was not the white figure in my dreams, I had this strong urge to protect her. Maybe because I had yet to know who that figure actually is and since Vicky was still my best lead. I never knew that I could be this selfish.

“Why?! What is this binding motive of yours that want to keep me safe?!”

“...” I couldn't answer that. If she knew the reason why, she will think I was crazy.

“What?! Couldn't you say why?”

“...” I averted my eyes from her without capable of saying a word. Not only that I could not answer her, I couldn't face her as well. “I just...couldn't.”

My mind began to wander, remembering the first moment I saw her. She just trusted me, even if she should not have. Back then I was relying on her blind faith on me, I remembered how glad I was when she could trust me wholeheartedly. But this was different, this time it was because the reason was too self-centred.

“Don't you trust me?” she continued, reassuring me with a composed tone, different with the tone she used to argue.

Trust, that was the problem; to be or not to be. While biting my tongue, I knew that I had to accept that whatever answer she will give me. Whatever it is, it will be an answer she gives because I trusted her, even if it is not the answer I wanted.

With determination, I gulped some air and exhaled a short sigh. I had reached acceptance, I just needed to trust her with her answer.

“This will sound crazy,” I said while moving my eyes back at her. “Do you remember back when I asked if you know someone by the name of Eve?”

“Yes, what about it?”

“It was because I dreamed you said that you know someone with that name.”

“You dreamed—”

“Yes, I dreamed about you, or someone who looked like you. But let's face it, how many people in this world that looks like you?”

“ ... ”

“I must be crazy right? You don't know me, but I keep felling that—”

“No, you are not,” Vicky interrupted me. She was looking at me as if I was looking like a child who lost his mother; her gaze was filled with warmth, while also filled with pity. “Are you sure you did not feed your feeling with that suggestion? Did you let your hope clouds your judgment?”

Come to think of it; I had. When I saw her for the first time, I was so sure that she could give me answers. I was still clinging to this, that was why I wanted to keep her safe so badly.

[Is it wrong if I do? Even if she is not that white figure?]

My answer is still ‘no,’ it should not be wrong.

“I did, I was desperate.”

“See, then you know why we will have to part ways at some points. You have your own path, while I too have my own path—”

Hope could cloud my judgment, and it did. I had become careless, that was the reason why I got shot in the first place. I remembered what I did with Dasan's crew, I united them when they needed it the most. Why couldn't I do it now? I'm sure It's because I was still blinded.

“I get it.”

Feeling resolved, I muttered something. This was the answer I kept avoiding, but hearing what she just told me, made me sure that this is what I should have done.

“If you don't want to come with me, then I will stay.”

“Huh?”

“I know, I shouldn't have ran away. They could give me answer, so I will just play by their rules. I will go with them, that way I could make sure that you don't get harmed. It is that simple.”

“What? But how about—”

“No, you said it yourself that we have our own paths. If I couldn't choose for

you, you couldn't choose mine.”

“So what? Do you just want to walk out there and let yourself get captured?!”

“Of course no, there are some things I need to know first.”

Thus our argument ended, she still didn't agreeing with me, but at least she accepted my plan. Since they might had watched us for some times now, they' might raid Vicky's apartment anytime. Until the night fades and the sun returns, I had kept myself awake.

Seconds, minutes, hours passed while I sat like a ragdoll on this couch. Not even budging ever since I sat on it at a time after midnight. I thought I was meditating, preparing myself for the truth I deserved.

Even if I should be feeling restless, my awareness didn't fade. I was still as stiff and sharp as I should be. My judgment was clear, I knew what I had to do. Putting aside all my hopes, I had to find answers.

“Good morning,” a voice greeted me as I saw its speaker just came out from her room.

Vicky who had left me to rest now returned to join me in the living room. The traces of waking up were still clearly seen on her face; her eyes were still heavy, her short hair was full of cowlick and sticking upward, and her lips were noticeably dry.

“...morning,” I replied lazily.

Just after then I spoke, I realised how restless I was. Apparently I had slept with my eyes open, and after I moved my body a little, I noticed how fatigued my body was.

Moving my body a little forced me to raise my hand and stretch my back. It helped a bit, I could feel the joint of my spine straightened. From Vicky's point of view, I thought I should look like a cat stretching his body, vertically.

“They don't seem about to move yet,” I continued while lowering my hands.

“Good, I need to refresh.”

After answering my report, she immediately headed towards the bathroom. While she washed herself, I approached the window and looked outside. In the

corner of the street, I couldn't see those two men anymore. Instead I saw someone else, one man wearing brown thigh long trench coat with a familiar face.

[*Odi...*]

Standing where those two men were was Odi, so he managed to escape from that store. It's true, after I shot his leg, I don't know what happened to him. I thought he crawled out from that store before police raided that place, spotted us, and followed us here.

Also remembering that I was not conscious that time, I guessed it was just natural that Vicky was not aware that someone had tailed her.

As I stared at him, both of his eyes were locked to this window. I could feel that our vision were intertwined, locked at each other. From his stare, I could read that he knew that I had already realised his and his team's presence, also I could read from his stare that he was taunting me.

As if we were talking telepathically, I silently accepted his challenge. After locking eyes for about a quarter of a minute straight, I backed away from the window and sat back on the couch. Knowing Odi was here, I need to rethink my plan.

Not too long after I began to think, Vicky came out from the bathroom. Nothing changed much from her appearance, apart from her damp hair which she still tries to dry with a towel she holds.

“Vicky, I think I need you to pack.”

“I told you, I am not leaving.”

“Please, do it as a plan B.”

“Plan B?”

“Shh!”

CRASH

My hearing suddenly reacts, the silence of the morning traffic outside made my hearing range expanded. I didn't know for exactly how far, but I could hear something, apart from the ticking clock on the wall. It was coming from outside;

the sound of door being breached.

Even if it was originating from the ground floor, the sound was faint but loud and clear here. Hearing that noise alerted me. It was unmistakable that the voice came from the front door; they were coming.

“Vicky, now!”

“But—”

“...” I didn't reply, I only flicked and tilted my head with disproving look on my face. After seeing that, she immediately headed towards her room.

While she prepared, I also prepared myself and released my gun's safety. Clattering of muffled yet rushed footsteps from the hall gradually getting intense, it ascended the stairs, and now they stood right in front of the door of Vicky's apartment.

BLAM

Suddenly the door in front of me got breached, someone had kicked the handle until the door forcefully opened and produced a staccato noise. The blast triggered my reflex, I raised my armed right hand and aimed it towards the door.

As the door opened, I saw three armed men; one was still recovering balance upon releasing a devastating kick unto the door, and another two were aiming their sidearm scanning the room. But after realising that I had aimed my gun to the door, their movement halted, even the man on the right who was scanning the room with his gun had to take cover behind the threshold.

“Drop... your... gun.”

There were only two man visible standing under the doorsill, one standing armed and the other one with his hand lowered. My hand aimed at the one with his gun ready, for a moment there was only silence, until the one with his gun aimed at me muttered an instruction which I was not happy to comply.

“You first, I just want to talk,” I replied.





“...”There is only silence, none of us want to lower our guard, yet none wanted to initiate offense, just like playing football with just two goalkeepers.

“Stop it, lower your gun!” suddenly another voice from the hall orders in a straight tone. “I said, lower your gun!”

That voice repeated his order, after a few seconds later, the armed man reluctantly obeyed. He started to lower his gun, seeing that I follow by slowly lowering my gun. After both of us lowered our guns, the one who gave that order starts to show himself.

“Odi...”

Odi, the sole survivor from my battle two days ago showed himself again in front of me. After I wounded his leg that day, now he looked like quite just fine, despite I could see that he was still walking stiffly.

He walked through the threshold and enter the apartment, a handgun was hanging on his right hand. His partners were still waiting behind the threshold, but he kept walking inside. With every step he took, I took a small step backward, making sure that he won't surprise me. I kept moving back until I passed the coffee table, where at the same time Odi also stopped.

“I just want to talk,” I said to him. “After that, you could just take me.”

“Sure, just talk.”

“But first, tell your men to wait outside, across the street.”

I could see Odi was provoked, my request made him bit his tongue.

“Fine.”

After taking a moment considering, he accepted my term. He turned his face leftward and raised his left hand, then he flicked his left hand, signalling the others to leave.

The others were not so happy with Odi's instruction. They protested silently by giving a disproving look. but Odi insisted by emphasizing his order by flicking his left hand a little bit harder.

Still looking disapproving, they finally obeyed reluctantly. While kept

watching over this room, they slowly moved back and left. After I couldn't see them anymore, I strafed to my left and approached the window to make sure that Odi's partners did leave the building.

With my whole front still facing Odi, I peeked into the window for a few times before I finally saw them exiting the building. When they exited, two of them were fixing their eyes into this apartment's window, meeting mine. While still staring at me, they slowly crossed the empty street and waited there.

After I was sure that the three of them had settled there, I removed my head away from the window and returned to face Odi. From her room, Vicky was looking concerned, I just nod silently to assure her.

Seeing me nodding, Odi averted his eyes to see where I was looking. He must had thought that I was alone, he smiled after he knew that I was looking at Vicky.

“So, what do you want to talk about?” Odi started to talk, taking my attention away from Vicky.

“...”

I was not ready to reply. Before I started talking, I raised my right hand to show him my weapon. Seeing what I was doing made him to clench his gun, but it did not stop me from applying my gun's safety and putting it on top of the dining table then slowly walk away approaching the TV set. “Put your gun on the coffee table.”

Hearing my instruction made him seem eased, he relaxed his clenched hand and walked towards the coffee table and puts his gun slowly.

“I want to know what you know about me,” I said breaking the silence.

“...”

“Answer me, please.”

“I don't know much, I just assigned to capture you when you landed, that is all I know.”

“...” after hearing the same answer again, I wondered if they had agreed to give that answer if I ask. If so it means I have to get the answer from someone

else. “Then who are you working for? Who is the Supervisor?”

“...I couldn't answer that.”

“What do you mean by couldn't?!” I complained with agitated tone.

“...” seeing me unable to hold back, Odi went silent.

“Sorry, why couldn't you answer that question?”

“Because I simply don't know.”

Same dead end, just like with Gyle. This meant that I had to let them take me if I wanted to find out who they were working for.

“Tsk,” I fussed in frustration. “Fine, you could take me, but I have one condition.”

“What is it?”

“You won't hurt her,” I pointed at Vicky who was watching us from her room to elaborate Odi who I was talking about.

“...” Odi looked at her for a while, the pause he made while considering was somewhat dubious. “Fine; I will leave her alone.”

I exhaled. I looked back at Vicky and whispered that everything was going to be fine. I could see that she was still looking intrepid, but that whisper was all I could to assure her.

“Is that all?” Odi continued.

“Yes.”

“Then shall we go now?”

Odi picked his gun up from the coffee table and walked toward the door. Upon exiting, he waited outside Vicky's apartment while still looking at me. Seeing this, I knew he was not giving me time to say goodbye.

Without wasting any more time, I took my journal and jacket from the dining chair and then wore it. I then walked toward the door while putting my journal into my jacket's inside pocket and fixing my eyes to Vicky while Odi was keeping his eyes on me. My eyes and Vicky's eyes were intertwined, while I filled my gaze with ‘everything will be fine,’ I could read from Vicky's eyes that she

was saying 'be safe.'

"Go on."

When I stepped outside the door, Odi told me to lead the way. Even after I turned myself in, he was still afraid that I will run away again.

Warily I walked in front of him, I followed the corridor to my right and turned left to descend the stairs. After reaching the ground floor, I traced the rest of the corridor until I reached the front door, the broken front door.

From here, I could see Odi's partners were waiting across the street near a silver sedan. Their appearance were quite peculiar, there was a dark skinned man wearing a short sleeved shirt, the other one was wearing a long sleeved white shirt with pale brown swirl patterns on it, and the last one was a young man wearing dark sunglasses. Seeing me coming out with Odi behind me changed their expressions from vigilant to content.

Without being instructed to, I knew I had to head there. I crossed the street and approached the others. Before I reached them, Odi hasten his walking pace and approach them first.

"He is going," Odi reports to his partners, "Don, tell the Supervisor that we have recovered the subject."

"That was easy," commented the one who wore long sleeved white shirt.

"Shut up, Marco," Odi criticised the one commented on his report.

After hearing Odi's report, one of them, which Odi called Don, drew out a mobile phone from his pocket and started to type something on it. It was almost identical with the phone I found on Odi when I was in his ambulance.

"What about the girl?" the man wearing short sleeves asked Odi.

"Haven't taken care of," Odi replied.

"What?"

"He stated that he will go with me if I leave the girl, I had to abide."

"The Supervisor ordered 'no witness'."

I don't like where this discussion was going.

“I know, Darius,” Odi continued, “that is why I said explicitly, that I will leave her. So if you could kindly take care of the girl?”

“Dammit, Odi...”

Darius, the man who Odi was talking to, immediately walked pass through me and cross the street. Knowing that Odi had double-crossed me, I soon turned back to chase him.

“Hold him!”

Unfortunately, I didn't walk too far, the other two; Don and Marco had restrained me on Odi's order.

Their hands were holding on my upper limb, restricting me from moving even further. While still trying to break free, Odi slowly moved around until he stood in front of my face.

“You promised you would leave her alone!” I said angrily with heavy breath.

“I am sorry, but an order is an order,” he responded, annoyingly with flat expression. “But technically I did leave her.”

I couldn't express my anger with words, while my right upper arm was still restrained, my left arm was still free. Furiously I raised my left hand and clenched my fingers into a fist. I pulled my hand backward, building a momentum, but before I could thrust it forward, Don's left hand moved from holding my left shoulder to restraining my left wrist.

“Just give up, Lieutenant, we really expect your—”

My movement was tied, I couldn't move forward at all. But, Marco and Don were only containing me from moving forward, so when I unexpectedly moved backward, they almost lose their balance and lost their grip on me.

When they tried to maintain their balance, they were basically just a weight that latched onto my body, I could drag them forward effortlessly. Even with them still clinging to my limbs, I moved forward and attacked Odi. Not with my clenched left fist, but with a headbutt I swiftly did as I moved forward at him.

My forehead clashed with his nose bridge, he jerked backward from the surprise of my attack until he fell on his bottom and rolled to his back while

covering his face. And without breaking my movements, I immediately used my left elbow to jab on Don's face.

While I unceasingly elbowing Don's face, Marco jumped to stop me by pounding my right gut. With every punch he laid on me, I could feel a tingling pain on my right side. I tried to ignore it, but his attack made my attack weaker. Luckily also with every attack I laid on Don, his grip getting gradually weaker.

After several attack, he released his grip from my left hand. Odi was still trying to wake up, but still unable to fight back; he was the least of my worry, so I focused on Marco.

He won't be so hard to deal with, I just need to swerve under my own armpit and he released his grip. I then violently kicked him on his left gut with my right knee, he lost his balance and fell on his knees. While he was still holding the pain on his gut, I hit him on his left temple with my right hand.

Marco fell, groggy but not enough to faint. Meanwhile Don had sneaked on my left and punched my left cheek. His punch was quite strong, but was not enough to knock me. I stepped rightward to make distance and made his second attack only hits air. After punching air, he almost slipped. Just before he recovered, I swept his leg to topple him.

Odi was recovering, but still covering his own vision. Coincidentally, he was kneeling in a line with my route to Vicky's apartment building, I ran towards him, but before I passed him, I hit his right cheek with my left knee until he fell on his face again.

While they were still recovering, I ran towards Vicky's apartment hastily. Darius had disappeared inside ever since after I headbutted Odi, that was why I had to be faster. I may only had seconds before he harms her.

Upon entering the building, I rushed on the stairs and ran towards Vicky's apartment. I arrived there in the nick of time, Darius was just pointing his gun at Vicky who was still cooped up in her room. Before he managed to pull the trigger, I ran pass through the broken door and jumped on him to push his right hand away.

BLAM

Apparently when I landed on him, Darius managed to pull the trigger. Fortunately I managed to push his gun away, the bullet pierced the wall near the window close to the dining table, far from Vicky who was cowering in her room with her eyes and ears closed.

I got distracted trying to make sure that Vicky was fine, I didn't realise that Darius had prepared himself to strike back. With the gun in his right hand, he punched my left face that pushed me until my back clashed with the wall near the door.

My position was dangerous, I had opened a gap that made him able to fire his gun at me. As I recovered, I found that he had aimed his gun at me, specifically he was aiming at my legs.

BLAM

Right after the loud bang, I could feel a sting on both of my legs. I couldn't tell where it came from exactly, but after a second, I could be sure that my leg did not get shot.

The sting was caused by the bullet that pierced the wall left to my left foot, when the bullet contacted with the wall, the wall trembled. And since my legs were still touching against the wall, the tremor transferred to my legs.

After confirming that I was not harmed, I looked at Darius. I could see that Vicky was clinging on his right hand, making it harder for him to aim his gun at me. Even after she made sure that Darius could not fire his gun, she kept hindering Darius by biting Darius's right forearm. Darius screamed in pain, it would seem that Vicky's bite was burrowing under his skin.

Soon after I comprehended the situation, Darius started to raise his left hand, ready to hit Vicky. I realised that his stance was the signal that I had to hit back, I propelled myself by bouncing my back against the wall to thrust forward and kick Darius's gun off of his right hand with my right foot. The gun got thrown across the room and landed right in front of kitchen doorsill.

“Vicky, get down!”

It took her a few seconds to act upon my command, even Darius managed to hit her a few times. I was guessing it was because her bite was too firm that her

jaw got stiffen, she needed a moment to release her bite. Soon after Vicky had removed herself from between me and Darius, I immediately charged in.

Seeing how he was standing, solid yet slightly crouching with both of his knees bending, I climbed on his right knee and thrust myself upward using my left foot. While I jumped, I used my right knee to kick his chin and my right elbow to slam on his crown simultaneously like a monkey wrench.

Upon attacking, I lost my balance as Darius was toppling backward. I landed roughly to the floor on my left side of my back. After I fell, Vicky immediately came to my aid and helps me to stand.

“You okay?” she asked.

I didn't have the time to answer her question, limply I approached the window, from there I could see that the other three had recovered and soon they will raid this apartment.

“Is there another way to get out from here?”

“Uh... we could use the emergency fire escape.”

“Great, where is it?”

“There,” she exclaimed while pointing toward the window that faces the alley, “right beside the alley window.”

“This place won't be safe for now, we need to go. You packed like I told you, right?”

She was still looking hesitant but also understood the necessity. She ran toward her room and grabbed a backpack. While she was taking her belongings, I picked the gun and the wallets on the dining table, the gun lying next to the kitchen, and crammed them into my jacket pockets after applying the second gun's safety.

After picking up all the things I would need, I approached the alley window to open the latch and raised it. I stuck my head outside and looked around, I found a set of emergency stairs to my left, it was not too far, I could reach it if I jump.

As I looked behind, I found Vicky was approaching. Seeing she was coming, I

climbed on the window sill then stood on the small ledge below the window. After I balanced myself, I jumped and grabbed on the emergency fire escape stair's railing.

It did not take much effort to climb it, and as I turned around, I found Vicky was already climbing on her apartment window. To help her, I stretched my right arm at her to make her jump much easier.

“No, no, no... Don’t reach my hand; jump then grab my hand!”

Seeing her trying to reach my hand from the ledge, I shook my head and guide her. If she kept reaching, she could lose her balance and fall down to the ground if she fails. The fall was only about five meters drop, but it would still hurt, especially for her.

Hearing my instruction, she took a stance and then jumped from the ledge. It was not hard to catch her clasping left hand. Thereafter she lost her footing and swung and crashed toward the stair's railing.

I summoned my strength and pulled her upwards. After she had managed to put her feet on the stair's ledge, she then transferred herself onto the stairs and then swiftly descended the stairs onto the ground.

Hearing a sound coming from Vicky's apartment, I pulled her hand and take her into the streets, in case they saw us when they check the window.

“I forgot my car keys!” she exclaims.

“Don't worry, it is better that way.”

If we take her car, it would be easier for them to find us. For now it was better for us to just blend in in the crowd, and since I knew the Supervisor issued a ‘no witness’ order, I could be sure that they will not engage us in the crowd.

After we exited the alley, we turned right and for the last time pass Vicky's apartment building. From here we will only need to pass another building before we reach an intersection and be clear from this street.

Despite walking hastily, we were not fast enough, I could see from the corner of my eyes as I looked back that they had exited Vicky's building apartment right before we took a right turn. I didn't know if they saw us, but I knew that we

were in desperate need of a transportation.

Once we took the right turn, I could see a taxi was waiting for passenger ahead, as I rubbed on my gun inside my jacket pocket, I thought I could arrange a transport.

“I have a plan,” I broke the silence between us without making any eye contact.

“What is it?”

“See that taxi?” I said while pointing at the taxi car ahead, “could you ask him to take us somewhere?”

“Sure, where to?”

“Anywhere, just make him get here.”

“Why? What are you—”

“Please be hurry.”

Reluctantly, she proceeded to approach the driver and talk to him while I hid in a nearby alley. I didn't know what she told him but in the end she managed to make the driver to take her.

So far, they haven't checked this street yet, but it could happen anytime. Soon once I heard a car engine closing in, I took a deep breath then left the alley to approach the incoming taxi with determination.

I crossed the street until I reached the middle of the street, the taxi passed through, but when its driver's seat door and I were aligned, I drew my gun from my jacket pocket and used its grip to smash on the door's windshield.

My first strike was not enough to shatter the glass, only enough to crack, but my second attack broke it. I immediately reached for the door lock and unlatched it, and then I grabbed the door's handle and opened it.

The middle-aged driver screamed and flailed around to defend himself as I forcefully tried to hijack his vehicle. His cry attracted the attention of those men, but fortunately when they saw us, I had entered the taxi.

“Theodore! What are you doing?!”

“Anything to survive.”

My answer silenced her. She proceeded to wear her seat belt without complaining.

I thought I had never driven a car before, but my motor instinct seemed to take over. My left hand shifted the gear lever after my left foot stepped on the leftmost pedal, and as my right foot stepped on the rightmost pedal, the car accelerated swiftly.

Just as I gassed the car, I could hear banging sound from behind this car. It was the sound of the taxi driver trying to seize back his vehicle, but his effort was meaningless. I felt pity seeing him, but for now I had to prioritise our survival.

Unfortunately, we had to pass through the intersection of Vicky's apartment building again. As we passed, we changed looks with those four men who were still looking for us, and this taxi's darkened windshield did not helped.

Before I crossed the intersection, I turned my face leftward and I saw that they had rushed into their car, which meant that I had to disappear soon. This street was quite long. I didn't see any other intersection or turn for a while.

Right when I looked behind via the rearview mirror, I noticed the silver sedan was advancing and closing in. Despite being distracted, I tried to remain calm by pretending that they were just another car passing by, remember that they are under ‘no witness’ order.

After riding on a lengthy road for a while with another car tailing us, I finally saw an intersection ahead. Since the traffic light was still green, I sped up and left the silver sedan. But when taking a right turn on the intersection, another car suddenly appeared from my left.

The sudden appearance of a burgundy SUV from the left made me pull the handbrake which made my car to slide leftward, just right before the SUV crashed, I had made a ninety degrees turn so the SUV only hit this car's shock absorber on the back.

The clash caused Vicky and I got jolted forward. Vicky is fine since she is wearing her seatbelt, but me who don't almost hit my head against the

windshield, fortunately I could place my left hand on the dashboard to suppress the impact.

I recover immediately, soon I return to sit on the driver's seat and look behind using the rear view mirror while hooking my seatbelt, from there, I noticed that inside the burgundy SUV are Odi and Darius, which means inside the silver sedan are Marco and Don.

Not too long after the crash, the silver sedan suddenly accelerates, I could see that the silver sedan is trying to pin my car. Knowing this, I release the handbrake and accelerate. This taxi lacks a good traction, so it took a while until it actually accelerates. Right after I accelerated, the silver sedan hits our car's back right side, but it does not affect anything except making me lost balance for a moment.

Those two cars also began to gather speed not too long after we leave them, but I managed to make quite a distance before they starts.

This street is quite rowdy, the left lane that we use is relatively empty compared the traffic in the opposite direction in the right lane. But to pass a car in front of me, I have to borrow a little space from the other lane, which is why I have to be careful every time I pass another vehicle.

Confidently I shift between the gears and step on the pedals like tap-dancing while swiftly turn the steering wheel left and right, the car moves effortlessly because of my dexterous driving. Vicky frequently squeals in dread when I drive too closely to another car. One-two-three cars I passed until I lost count of the traffic. I also frequently try to look behind using the rear view mirror, I noticed that the burgundy SUV is having a hard time following us while the silver sedan is quite nimble, maybe because Odi's capabilities is still limited to his wound.

When I see another intersection, I don't even wait for the light to change to green, seeing the right lane is empty, I hasten my car by stepping on the pedal even deeper after shifting the gear down to unleash more horsepower and momentarily borrow the right lane to pass the traffic queue on the left lane. Some of the car from behind the left and right turn blare their horns seeing me driving like a madman, but I try not to pay them attention since I need to make

the turn.

The turn was quite easy to make, most of the cars on the streets stopped and blare their horns after seeing my car charging on like a raging bull, fortunately I did not caused any traffic accidents, not that I could see. Upon ruling over the intersection, I take my chance to turn left.

“This is useless,” I break the intense silence between me and Vicky, “we need to disappear.”

“...so, what's in your mind?”

I was hoping she could give me ideas, but she was occupied with something else.

While driving casually after losing our tails, I see railroads separated by wire fence parallel with the path where I drive to my right. This view gives me an idea.

“Hey, Vicky,” I call to attract her attention from the view outside her left window, “do you know where the train station is?”

“From here, I think it is just a few kilometres ahead.”

“Okay, then.”

Since I stopped the traffic back in the intersection, this road is fairly empty. For a while I speed up to make the distance between us and our pursuer even further. After speeding on the street for a while, we reached a different district. We were now seems to be on the uptown.

In the back seat, Vicky was looking concerned. I really wanted to assure her, but seeing she hadn't looked at me in the last few minutes, not even a peek, I think it was better to leave her for now.

The uptown consisted of some very tall building while the rest were mostly three to six stories tall. While the traffic was more rowdy, the road was also wider, some even connected with overpasses that tangle above the ground. For me it was perfect, the complex layout should help me lose our tails.

For a while I slowed down and blended with the traffic, trying not to act conspicuous. So far as we left the uptown and headed towards the train station

through a least modern district, we hadn't attracted any unwanted attention. But when we were waiting front most on an intersection for the traffic light to turn green, suddenly a familiar vehicle passed through.

It was just for a split second and indistinct, but I could see the driver of the burgundy SUV from its right side mirror. He must have caught a glimpse of the blue taxi with broken driver side window that I drove, which was why the SUV took a sudden imperfect U-turn, causing other cars from its opposite direction to hit their brakes.

The manoeuvre that the SUV made was my cue to flee. Without even heeding the traffic light, I hit on the gas pedal soon as I saw a gap enough for us to pass through between four cars which come from my left and right.

Again, since the tires were lacking traction, the car accelerated without moving for a moment before it charges forward. When we crossed the intersection, the SUV had just finished its U-turn and about to accelerate. It was not until after a few seconds later it started to emerge from the intersection and took a sharp turn to chase us.

The SUV vigorously rushed its acceleration in order to chase us, soon I found them tailing us. Seeing this, I immediately shifted the gear up and accelerated even faster, but still it didn't take long before the SUV matched us.

Since the road was not quite occupied, the SUV daringly challenged us from the right lane. They stuck at our car's right side for a while until I saw Darius preparing his gun from behind the front passenger seat window.

While all of these happening, I realised something rather ironic; Vicky who was terrorised now seem composed, unlike before when she gasped and squealed whenever frightened. This time she just held on tightly on her seat and closed her eyes, which allowed me to focus on driving.

It did not take long before we encountered another vehicle on this lengthy road where we were racing. Right before Darius rolled his window down, their SUV had to avoid other a vehicle with blaring horn coming from another direction by slowing down.

They had to slow down and stabilised their car as they abruptly merged to our lane and tailgate behind our car. This would give me an advantage if I was

driving in an empty road, but since there were other vehicles in front of us, I couldn't take the chance to speed up, instead I had to slow down and wait for a gap on the right lane to pass the traffic line on the left lane.

“Theodore! Behind!”

“*Huh?*”

Vicky who had been quiet suddenly broke my focus from watching the passing vehicles from the opposite direction, her warning took my attention from the side window to the rear view mirror.

Seeing the reflection of the SUV charging in made me promptly hit on the gas pedal and added speed on the slowing down car. Our taxi accelerated, but I still couldn't see a gap to slip through on the right lane. There was only small space left between our taxi and the dark green wagon car when I found another way.

The right lane was busy, but to the left, the sidewalk was fairly unoccupied. There were only a few pedestrians walking on it and I believed it was wide enough for our car to run on. I didn't like it, but there was no other way I could see if I didn't want to get pinned between the enemy cars.

In one swing, I made a hard turn leftward and stabilised straightaway when the front left side of our car almost touched the wall of a building. As we squeezed into sidewalk, the left side of our car scraped against the wall of the buildings. There was barely any space left on the sidewalk for the taxi and the pedestrians. While the taxi took the most space of the sidewalk, the pedestrians took cover in a small space left between the taxi and the road, heeding the warning I gave by loudly blaring my car's horn.

As we squeezed through while honking my way on the sidewalk, I could see from the reflection of the rearview mirror that the SUV had climbed onto the sidewalk after crashing the wagon's rear left side when it was about to enter the sidewalk and thrown the wagon rightward into the right lane.

The SUV chased us on the same path while disregarding the damage it had caused to the wagon. Despite being able to squeeze on the sidewalk, the SUV advanced in slower rate since its size was slightly wider than our taxi.

I kept pressing my way through until the sidewalk ends at an intersection,

while blaring my horn to warn any pedestrian walking from behind the bend. I climbed down from the sidewalk and merge onto the asphalt road again before crossing the intersection.

We only made small distance before the SUV crossed the intersection and began chasing us. Again I had to engage into expert driving mode and slide through the light traffic on these roads. Frequently I checked the rearview for our pursuer. This time Odi was working hard to catch with us.

It was not speed that enable me to outmanoeuvre him, but agility. Every car that I sprightly passed prevented them from closing in to us. I kept driving aimlessly without a destination, but I had an objective; to lose them before I headed towards the train station.

Apparently my objective was getting harder to achieve, not long after racing on the roads, the silver sedan suddenly joined our game of tag after merging in between our car and the SUV from the right bend of an intersection. Its sudden appearance obstructed the SUV, if I were a few seconds slower, the silver sedan would have ambushed us.

Without realising it, we were back into the uptown, just from the other side of it. The silver sedan was far better in agile driving, it only took them less than a minute and a few hundreds of metres in a one way street to catch with us and match our speed.

From this distance, I finally could see that the silver sedan was being driven by Marco while Don sitting beside him. Despite my focus on the road in front of me, I couldn't help but to look to my right again and again after I saw that Don had drawn out his handgun and aimed it to us; to the front right tire of our car to be precise.

BLAM

He fired a bullet, but his shot only hit the road since I managed to shift my car leftward a bit right before he pulled the trigger, but he didn't wait long to prepare the next shoot. After realising that his first shot had missed, he immediately re-aimed for the front right tire again. I didn't think he will be fooled with the same trick, which was why I sharply swung the steering wheel rightward before he could fire another shot.

The right side of our car clashed against the left side of the silver sedan. Don managed to avert his aiming from the front tire towards me, but it was too late for him to fire, I managed to grab his wrist and punched the gun from his hands.

Soon after Don's gun landed on my lap, I grabbed it with my right hand and aimed it towards Don. I didn't intend to shoot. I just wanted to taunt him.

After a few seconds pointing a gun at him, we are closing in towards another car. I waited another few of seconds before I moved my aiming and squeezed the trigger.

BLAM

The gun's recoil shook my left hand too, our car shook a bit before I pulled my hand back in and stabilised the car with both of my hands. After I made sure that I was not driving into anything dangerous, I averted my attention towards the drifting car in front of ours and the silver sedan.

I fired a bullet into that car's rear right tire, causing it to lost control and started to drift rightward. The silver sedan had to do a sharp turn rightward to avoid collision, but when doing so, the silver sedan crashed with a transformer pole on the sidewalk.

The silver sedan did not get totalled. Marco managed to hit on the brakes before they crashed, and thus they only get stuck.

When I found an intersection, I took another right turn. My objective to lose my tails was halfway done, I just needed to lose the burgundy SUV still tailing us.

Unfortunately, the turn I took earlier led me to a road still under repair. But right before it was a one way overpass over a freeway. I checked the rearview mirror and found that the SUV had followed us. Since I couldn't possibly turn around, the only way I could take was toward the overpass.

“Are you all right?” I tried to calm myself by talking to Vicky while staring at her via the rear view mirror.

“I'm fine.”

“Don't worry, okay? I will not let them catch—”

When still fixing my eyes onto the rear view mirror, I caught a glimpse of the view in front of me. In front of me, there were lines of traffic of unmoving cars. I was close enough to hit the brakes just before I hit the hindmost car of the traffic.

Knowing that we won't move for a while, I turned around to check on the SUV. The SUV itself was only two cars behind us and will soon catch with us.

“What are we going to do?” Vicky's voice took my attention away from the view of Odi and Darius getting off from their burgundy SUV.

The traffic in front of us won't let our car to pass, if I didn't want them to catch us, the answer was simple; we had to run.

“Get out, we have to run.”

Hurriedly I unhooked my seatbelt and got out from the car. I looked behind at the two men who were walking at fast pace approaching us, while impatiently waiting for Vicky to dismount from the car. After I turned around, I realise how far we were from reaching the end of the overpass, but we will had to scale its distance if we don't want to get caught.

When I turned around again, I found Vicky had opened the door and about to get out. Seeing Odi and Darius approaching at alarming rate, I took her hand and start to run.

Dragging Vicky was not a good idea, she could barely keep on with me. I had to match her speed. Her stamina only allowed us to run a short distance, we couldn't move even faster unless I carry her, which also was not a good idea.

When I turned around, I saw that Vicky was gasping her breath for life. Seeing how she looked made me unable to drag her anymore.

“I'm sorry,” Vicky said while still gasping.

“...”

I didn't know what to say. I could reach this far because I wanted to keep her out of harm, and seeing her unable to move made me clueless of what I should do next.

Where we stood on this overpass was not too high, only as tall as a two stories building, and right below us was a freeway that stretch so far I couldn't see where it started from or where it led to. The traffic on that freeway was far barer than this overpass, but there were more kinds of car there than here.

“Just give up, Lieutenant!”

It was over, Odi and Darius had caught up. Just about one car behind us, they were walking slowly, approaching us while still being alert with Darius whispering into a radio.

“No! If it means that you will kill her, I will not give up!” I said while covering Vicky behind my back.

“She is a witness, we have to work clean!”

This was not what I want. I wanted answer, but I also want Vicky to be safe, and they say I could only have one.

FWOO

As if the high wind that blew on this overpass had not made our voices hard to hear, suddenly a loud horn of a truck blared and announced its presence from the freeway below.

[*Wait...*]

That sound gave me an idea, an idea that I was not sure I liked, but I could be sure that this was both a good and bad idea. Good because if it is executed properly, we could lose our pursuer, and bad because to do it, we will have to do something extreme.

“Vicky,” I called her without turning around, “you still trust me, right?”

“...” she didn't answer, but I could hear that she was still stabilising her breath. “Yes.”

I could hear her answer among her loud gasps. Her answer was both wanted and unwanted, but I was very glad to hear that rather than the alternative.

“Then... will you close your eyes?”

This overpass had narrow shoulders, and the shoulders were guarded by a

boundary that was only about as tall as my stomach. It was enough to stop a car from falling but easy for someone to climb on to.

Vicky did not answer my last request, but I had a sound decision, even if she did not confirm, I will still take her.

I waited for the right moment, listening for the wind that the container truck made as it approached the underpass. And right when Odi and Darius only a few steps away from us, I started to pull Vicky's left hand. When I grabbed her hand, I noticed that her eyes were closed, but sensing I was pulling her, she promptly open them.

Soon when they realised what we were doing, Odi and Darius hastily rushed. Still, it did not take long to climb on the overpass's safety railing and pull Vicky onto it, doubt could be seen on her face.

“You trust me, right?”

Without even waiting for her answer, I jumped off from the overpass onto an oncoming container truck under while holding Vicky's shoulders. Our jump was timed perfectly, not too late nor too soon. The overpass was not too high, jumping onto the container truck's roof was only about five metres drop that could be easily suppressed with a somersault.

When we landed, we dropped and rolled leftward to smooth and silence the landing. It was quite hard manoeuvre remembering that I was still holding Vicky in my embrace. Despite we landed harshly and caused a noise, the sound of the traffic, including its own loud horn, makes the truck's driver did not realise that we had hitched a ride.

I tried to recover, but Vicky was clinging tightly to me, making it hard for me to stand. I had to lift her weight to kneel, which was funny since I just realised how light she is.

“It's okay,” I assured her by cupping my hands on her cheeks, while additionally rubbing her frightened damp eyes with my thumbs. “You could open your eyes now.”

Soon she opened her eyes, I could see my own reflection on her watery glistening eyeballs. She was scared, up to the point where she couldn't speak, I

knew she doesn't like being pushed, but I had to.

“I'm sorry, okay?” I continued comforting her, which she only replied with rapid nodding.

While still kneeling, I turned around to look at the overpass we jumped, despite far, I could see Odi and Darius watching us, with Darius still whispering over his radio.

For now we were safe. Vicky and I could sit peacefully on the truck's container roof, only to wait while fighting against the wind while the truck was cruising on the freeway. We were waiting for the truck to slow down so we could climb down, but despite we passed some freeway exit, this truck still ran on the freeway, even when the scene of the cities changed to the view of seaside roads.

We had been sitting on this truck for a while, even I lost track of how long exactly time had passed. I was guessing at least twenty minutes though. Also, Vicky had been considerably quiet, since we landed, she only talked twice, which the last time she said that we will talk later.

BLAM

Suddenly, a gunshot could be heard from behind. Hearing the sound of a gun being fired, I instinctively looked behind, the object I saw behind this truck makes my eyes dilated.

Since I was too occupied looking at distance, I did not realise that the familiar silver sedan had sneaked behind this truck, complete with its battle wounds. On it was Don sitting on the side window while aiming his gun from its roof.

His first shot was aimed at Vicky, fortunately it missed. Soon after I realised that they were targeting her, I told her to get down and take cover.

“Wait here!” I commanded her, which she did not respond.

After I made sure that Vicky was safe, I immediately drew my gun from my jacket and released its safety before I stood. I walked closer to the ledge and take aim.

BLAM

I fired a shot, but it hit the silver sedan's roof instead. It was not hard to lock Don in my target, but I forgot to take the motion of the cars into account. When I tried to refine my aiming, the car suddenly shifted leftward and started to accelerate.

The silver sedan vigorously rushed beside the truck, and as the car tried to pass the truck, Don could be seen climbing onto its roof.

I crouched and crawled along the left side of the container since Don was still fixing his aiming at me while struggling to climb to his car's roof.

Soon when he jumped onto the truck's front seat, I rushed myself approaching the truck, but it was too late. Don had breached the door and entered the truck. Seeing that, I dashed towards the corner ledge, I stepped on my right foot when I reached the corner and jump.

Before I fell, I reached and grabbed onto the top of the opening door. As my weight contacted with it, I immediately swung my body inside. Inside the truck, Don and the truck driver were having a struggle. I immediately interceded by knocking Don's back head with my gun. It did not take him down, but I had his attention now.

While watching Don and I fought, the truck driver was doing his best to drive the truck under pressure. Don turned around and laid a punch to my left cheek, I couldn't block it since he caught my left hand. When he was about to lay another punch, I managed to pull my right hand, I used it to strike his eyes with the gun I held.

My attack was enough to blind him, so the rest was easy. Twice I hit him again, once on his ears and once on his nose. Despite refusing to faint, he had been disabled, I just needed to get rid of him.

I passed my gun to my left hand and wrapped my right hand with the old and snarled seatbelt. I then locked his hip with my left hand, after which I pulled my body backward and lifted Don's body. It was kind of like a suplex, except that I was sitting.

As I kept pulling my body backward, I reached the point where my body fell out from the truck, that moment was when I release my grip from Don's hip. While my right hand which was wrapped with the truck's seatbelt prevented me

from falling, Don fell off from the truck and hit over the road.

Before I could recover, I failed to realise that the silver sedan has been waiting for me right beside the truck. When I saw it, it has already ramming itself towards me, despite the split second event, I managed to pull my left hand and squeezed my gun's trigger.

BLAM

My gun blasted a bullet off, my shot hit the silver sedan's front right tire. The tire ripped and bursted, and since the car was turning when the tire got shot, the car lost its balance.

Marco, the one who drive it, tried to balance the car by braking, but instead stopping, the car drifts instead. It keeps drifting until it passes under the container's wheels.

The silver sedan got crushed by the container's rolling wheels, but at some point, the car got lodged under the wheels. The container lost its traction and started drifting leftward. Since I didn't know if the driver had control over this, I had to check. I tried to raise my body up but I failed to find something to hold on to, even the hanging door kept slipping when I tried to hold on to it. When I tried to balance myself I remembered something important that I forgotten; Vicky.

Motivated with that thought, I summoned my strength and pulled myself by depending only on the seatbelt that was wrapping my right hand. When I tried to climb, the silver sedan finally dislodged from the wheels and got crushed by the sixth wheels of the container, the tremor caused me to lose my balance.

Knowing the truck had lost its anchor, the driver tried to stabilise, but the truck and the container had been too bent on its axle, even if the truck was able to run straight, the container was still drifting and become another anchor.

When I fell, the seatbelt got torn down a bit, but every second I was hanging from it, my body weight makes the tear bigger. Again, I tried to pull myself up, carefully so I didn't apply too much weight on it. But before I could recover, the seatbelt gave in.

I fell and hit the road, through under the drifting container. When my body hit

the asphalt, I rolled over a few times before I finally lost my consciousness.

———
———!

A familiar voice woke me, helped me to grasp my conscious before losing it further. Slowly I opened my eyes, my vision fuzzy and unclear, but a name was clearly seared on my mind; Vicky.

“Vicky...” I called weakly while trying to stand.

I could feel pain all over my body, my cheek and my hands were bleeding from a scrape wound I got from rolling over the road. Some joints in my body also felt swelling, but I tried to ignore my wounds as hard as I could.

“Vicky!” I called again, this time after I stood and with loud voice.

The view around me was terrible, the silver sedan had been turned over a few metres behind me while the truck was tiptoeing on the ledge of the freeway after half of its container crashed through the freeway's side rail and hanging over a cliff. Even after my vision got better, I couldn't find Vicky.

“Theodore!”

Faintly, I could hear someone calling me. It was not the same voice that prevented me from passing out, besides, it called me with my current name. Despite so, the voice is very familiar.

[*Vicky?*]

“Vicky?!”

“Theodore!”

After the second call, I could pinpoint from where the voice was coming, and after turning around, I knew I had to help her and fast.

From the hanging container, I heard Vicky's voice desperately calling for me. I didn't need a third call to make me run towards the balancing truck.

Hastily and while ignoring the pain from my wounds, I limply ran toward the truck. Upon reaching it, I frantically climbed on its nose while ignoring the driver who is lying unconscious on the steering wheel until I reached the roof.

From here, I walked without lifting my feet very slowly so I didn't add too much weight onto the hanging end.

“Vicky!”

“...Theodore!”

There was no mistake, Vicky's voice was definitely coming from that end of the truck.

[*No, no, no...*]





I dropped down and crawled while approaching the ledge, from the ledge I could see that Vicky was hanging on the container's door handle.

Fortunately, the container's door handle could only be opened if it was turned upward, so I didn't have to worry about Vicky weighing the handle.

“Theodore—”

“Take my hand!”

It was obvious what I had to do, I reached my right hand under the ledge, desperately stretching my reach for Vicky, but only a span of hand left until I could reach her.

“Could you climb?”

CRAANK

She shook her head in fright, and honestly, hearing that heavy metal scraping frightened me too, the longer I stay on this ledge, the more the container was tilting. I knew I didn't have much time left, so I crawled even deeper into the ledge and reached even further, but I still couldn't reach her.

[My belt!]

I remembered I could extend my reach using my belt. Frantically I pulled myself and unfastened my belt as the container slowly continued to tilt. Hastily I removed my belt and wrapped it to my right hand, after holding it tightly, I dropped to the ledge and threw the other end at Vicky.

“Grab it!”

“Theodore...”

“Don't speak! Grab it!”

“No, it's useless. Just go.”

Between her frightened watery glistening eyes, her red almost crying nose and cheeks, and her trembling lips, she faked a smile. A very sweet smile yet I hated it.

“Don't say that! Take it!”

I kept pushing her since almost all part of the container had been plunged into the cliff, the only thing that was preventing this truck from falling is the hook in the truck's axle.

“It's okay, just go.”

“No, no, no...”

“Go! Or none of us will make it!”

The more she talked, the more the container was sinking. I noticed that her hands was slipping, even some of her fingers were bleeding, yet she was still hanging tightly.

She was hanging on for me, she did not want the last image of me seeing her lifeless, especially since she knew that I knew nothing about her.

“Thank you.”

I didn't know why I thanked her, but apparently she understood why. The fake smile on her face was getting wider and wider before it finally broke. I took a deep breath before I rose and turn around, leaving her alone.

The container had been tilting out of balance, knowing this, I hastily dashed towards the truck's head. When I reached the container's middle ledge, I jumped and landed on the truck's roof, the rest was easy, I just needed to descend the truck's nose.

When I landed on solid ground, I turned around and powerlessly watched over the falling truck. Soon the truck plunged into the cliff, I didn't see it happen, but I could hear the splashing sound of the truck landing on the shore at the bottom of the cliff.

Invitation

24 June 2010

Mombasa Outskirts

09.08

“Go! Or none of us will make it!”

She said that desperately, for the first time I knew the feeling of being pushed, and it was terrible.

A bright smile decorated her frightened face, like a rainbow during a rain, it was beautiful yet despicable.

Those images are seared in my brain, I couldn't live without forgetting it, even right now, as I walked towards the wrecked silver sedan that caused all of this.

In my right hand was a gun, when I fell out from the truck, I had lost my sidearm, but I still had another one in my jacket, it was loaded with all the bullets I needed to unleash my fury and I already released its safety. I didn't care, I just couldn't contain this anger.

From the upside-down driver door window, I saw a bloody figure struggling to get out. He was crawling out by pulling his whole body forward using his left hand, his right shoulder was rigid yet his right hand was being dragged like a dead snake. Almost his whole body except for his left hand and his neck were broken.

After walked close enough, I stopped. Hatefully I looked down at the crawling maggot that was still clinging for its life until his left hand touched my right foot, noticed my presence, he promptly stopped and looked upward.

He raised his vision as high as he could until his eyes met with mine, disdainfully I stared at him, as right now I was the ultimate judge of his life or his death.

“P... please... I... I...”

“Shut up,” I coldly silenced him, “what is it you want from me?”

“We were just... ordered to capture you... after you immobilized Odi's team,” he answered agonising, choking on between air, blood, and his own vomit every few words.

“And ‘no witness’? What about all the people watching our stunts today? Are you going to kill them too?”

“Cough, cough,” Marco choked when he tried to breathe through his nose, he had to breathe through his mouth. Probably his trachea was broken, which made talking a lot harder, “you brought this... on her.”

“...”

“If you'd just... If you never... approached her that day—”

“STOP TALKING LIKE I AM THE EVIL ONE HERE—”

“SHE WAS A WITNESS!”

Marco shouted, unleashing all the words he wanted to say in one breath before I could finish yelling at him. He was still the least menacing figure between us, but his shout managed to silence me for a moment.

“She was a witness... She made contact... She knew... your existence... Those are the criteria... of being... a witness.”

“My existence? What does my existence have something to do with her—”

“YOU ARE A KILLER, LIEUTENANT!” he shouted again, “when you are a killer... it is just essential... that if someone... knows about you... they need to be... taken care of.”

There that again, amidst his desperate gasps, was the statement that I kept on hearing. They knew nothing about me, but they could confidently assume that I was a killer, a murderer.

So far, I had seen what I am capable of, and indeed they are not something that ordinary people could do naturally. Even one of my dreams pointed in that conclusion, I was trained, but despite of everything I had done, I knew that I

was incapable of taking the life of other's for no reason.

“Say that again.”

Again, after feeling resolved earlier this morning, emotion got the best of me. This time, anger controlled my right hand, pointing the gun I hold towards Marco's head, while grief clouded my vision.

[I am a killer.]

[I am a killer.]

[I am a killer.]

“You...”

Marco spoke without hesitation, despite agonising.

“...are...”

He continued with pauses with every word he said. A glint of fear could be found within his eyes, yet he persisted to provoke me.

“...a...”

Before he uttered the last word, he took a breath and holds it. Everything in the whole world seemed like pausing all theirs activities, making me couldn't hear anything else but Marco's voice.

“...kille—”

BLAM

With the breath he held, he said his last word. But before he could finish it, a bullet shell released from my gun's chamber right after I squeezed its trigger. The bullet my gun blasted pierced above of Marco's right eye, before his brain shut down, his reflex kicked in, pulled his head backward ineffectively dampening the bullet's velocity.

[My first direct kill.]

After his head landed lifelessly onto the asphalt, blood starts to pour out from his entry wound. A red puddle soon formed, but before it could spread to my right shoe, I had left.

Feeling satisfied, I walked the overturned silver sedan around from its front side. Behind it is a halted traffic, four lanes of cars were filling the three freeway lanes. Still limping, I approached a black convertible on the front of the line since it seemed to be the fastest car among the other cars in the front line. As I approached some of the driver cursed at me, but when I pointed my gun at them, they went silent.

The black convertible's owner slowly backing away with his hands raised as I walked towards his car's driver seat with my gun pointed at him. Other drivers who surrounded me also tried to be a good citizen and fight, but when I aimed my gun at them, they refrained.

Fortunately, the owner left the black convertible's key intact, even the engine was still running. After I entered the car and closed the door, I immediately accelerated and left the crime scene.

When I passed through the broken road for the last time, I couldn't help but to remember the very last view of Vicky. Funny, reminiscing that cured my anger, yet making grief within me grows even stronger.

I remembered how nice she was then, she was nobody to me, she was not even the white figure I dreamt about, yet losing her caused so much pain.

In a way, what Marco said was true, I brought this upon her. If I was a killer, the path I walked must be filled with this kind of traps, I couldn't get myself attached, I couldn't simply giving my trust any more soul.

The view of the empty freeway soon look blurred, the very first thing I thought if I was dreaming, but no. All the aches from the wounds I got feel so real, despite how hard I yearned for it, no, I was not dreaming.

After I moved my left hand and touch my left eyes, I realised that my heart hurts so much that I started crying silently. I didn't sob emotionally, tears just dripping out from my eyes, it was not me who was crying, more like an unknown part of me who did.

Disgusted by myself, I wiped those tears and calmed myself, fortunately I had the whole road for myself, so I didn't have to worry about crashing onto anything. And since I was still on the outskirts of the city, I didn't think I will find any freeway exit soon.

[*No way...*]

A few minutes later, after cruising on the freeway for a moment, looking for an exit, I accidentally took a peek at the rear view mirror. From there I noticed another car occupying this freeway apart from me, that car looked very familiar yet I briefly forgotten about its existence. It's the burgundy SUV Vicky and I left when we jumped the overpass.

After coming this far, I hadn't escaped from their reach, the SUV was closing in at alarming rate. The car I drove was fast, but unfortunately, it was automatic, I couldn't make it accelerate faster than it already had instantly.

Not before long, the SUV managed to catch up with me, it even managed to ram the back side of my car. That is why the next time it about to ram again, I shifted leftward to avoid its ramming and then shift again rightward to prevent them from passing me.

The SUV tried to pass me a few times, but every time it did, I moved my car in front of it so it couldn't go through, and so far, I managed to prevent them from passing my car.

After a few tries, the passenger window started to roll down, a figure then seen poking out with a gun in his hand, it was Odi.

That explained the different pace of the SUV, compared from last time, this time the SUV seemed more aggressive.

Seeing Odi pointing his gun at my car, I shifted my car rightward to make him harder to lock me. But every time I did that, Darius, the SUV driver also followed me to shift rightward, giving Odi a better place to aim.

Fortunately, before I reached the barrier on the centre of the freeway and ran out of space to shift rightward, I noticed that the freeway exit was not too far ahead.

I tried to make as little as room left before I took the turn into the exit so I could deceive the SUV into thinking that I will not take this exit, so when I almost passed the exit, I sharply turned the steering wheel leftward, causing the SUV to pass the exit as I smoothly head for the descending exit ramp. Without any traffic in the freeway, that only gave me a small leading time.

This exit ramp led to a tunnel below the freeway, where then it merged to a street in the downtown area of the city. I took a while figuring out where should I go next, so before I knew it, the SUV had appeared behind my car.

Seeing the SUV had begun to chase me again, I indifferently took the right street, my initial plan was to lose them and then take the train, but I had lost the chance since I didn't know where the train station is. So for now, I think I will just improvise.

Unlike on the freeway, these downtown streets were populated, other cars were using the road. Also, unlike the taxi I drove earlier and my condition back then, I was having a hard time ruling the streets now.

BLAM

BLAM

Odi released some bullets from the SUV, one hit the back side of my car and the other landed on the asphalt. He was trying to shoot my car's tire.

It was convenient that the car I drove was low while their car is high, as long as I didn't give side opening, he will have a hard time shooting my tire.

Unlike before, the difficulty of eluding the SUV had increased; first, Darius was far more aggressive compared than Odi in driving, second, the car I was driving was automatic, which was a handicap in speed and control, and third, since I was wounded quite good, I couldn't drive as agile as I was earlier.

If I don't want them to catch up with me, I had to create obstacle, the easiest way was to cause chaos and destruction. That way, there might be some collateral damage. I hated it, but I had to try to make it harder for the SUV to match me.

By still trying my best to outrun them, I could see my first chance on the next intersection. The traffic lights for this road was still red while the traffic lights on the road that intersects this road was green, vehicles were going and coming from both left and right bend. I think if I managed to slip through the gap of those cars, it could give me time.

With determination and after exhaling a deep breath, I stepped on the gas pedal even deeper, this black convertible accelerated slowly and gradually even

slowlier, but when it reached its top speed, it was enough to keep me in lead.

When I was about to reach the intersection, I suddenly shifted onto the right lane, the SUV had anticipated this and also shifted right. While both of our cars now racing on the right lane, another car went onto this lane and coming from the opposite direction, seeing this, I immediately hit on my horn and blast it as loud as I could to alert the incoming car's driver. The driver heeded my warning by turning sharply onto the sidewalk and let himself to hit the wall of a building.

Because I blared my horn too early, the traffic from the bends noticed our arrival, some of them hit their brakes before they cross the intersection. But that didn't ruin my plan. However at the middle of the intersection, there were two cars trying to clear out.

Those two cars were still about to pass each other. I estimated that I will only have enough space to squeeze through. Without slowing down, I kept advancing, while the distance between me and those cars were closing in, they made even larger gap between them.

Like a banana peel, I managed to squeeze through the gap smoothly while holding my breath. Despite so, I believed that I scraped the left side of my car against the rear side of the car that was going left.

As I crossed the intersection, I entered the left lane again and race on the fairly empty lane. Seeing how hard I was trying to squeeze through, it seemed I had a little time to relax.

CRASH

I was startled when I looked behind to check on the SUV, the SUV did not even slowed down or try to avoid those cars. The SUV had just rammed through the rear side of the dark green sedan that was going right, like a bull goring anything on its path.

The green sedan got thrown into the air before it landed on its roof against the frontmost car's windshield that was waiting for the traffic lights to change green. Yet while causing this much destruction, the SUV never slowed down.

Seeing this, I also disregarded slowing down and instead pushing the gas pedal again, but no matter how deep I step on it, I still couldn't outrun that SUV.

After then, I couldn't find any other opportunity to impede the SUV's run, even until this street ended at a T junction.

Seeing at the rear view mirror, I knew my situation was bad. With the SUV tailing me awfully close at my rear; only about less than another car yet it was a distance it could not scale, it will be unwise to make a turn.

I knew I saw a small alley between two flat houses across the junction, but unfortunately it was not wide enough for my car to pass through. If only it did, I could lose the SUV there.

In any case, I was running out of choices; I didn't have any other option than taking the gambit of taking the turn unless I wanted to frontally hit the wall of a flat house across the junction. So even without taking the traffics from the bends into considerations, I turned my steering wheel sharply to left just before the street ends.

Just as I thought, when I turned leftward, I spelled my own doom. Without having an anchor locking my car's rotation in the slightest radius, it was impossible to turn without decelerating. So as my car was skidding leftward, my car's rear side was exposed. With the smallest bump, the SUV sent my black convertible spinning.

Neither accelerating or braking helped stopping this car from spinning like a top, my car made a full spin before its right side crashed against the wall of a building.

Spinning like that made me dizzy, but even in such pressure, I could still function properly. Soon I removed my seatbelt from its hook and scooted onto the passenger seat before then exiting the car through the left door.

Just as I stepped out, I realised that the SUV took a dead turn rightward after throwing my car off the road and also crashed to the wall of another building.

Unlike me, they were slower in recovering, but not before long I noticed that the driver's seat door was opened. They were about to chase me again.

I looked around. It would be nice if I could find another vehicle. That way I could easily escape from them, but apart from us, there was no other vehicle around. This meant that I had to run.

But, I couldn't simply run, running on this street will leave me in the open. That was why instead of running away from them, I ran towards them.

Between me and them, there was a small alley between the two buildings. I ran towards it and entered the passage just right before Darius could turnaround and aim his gun toward me.

BLAM

While tracing the alley, I drew my gun out and kept an eye at the street. Soon I fired when I see Darius about to enter this passageway to chase me. My shot did not hit him, but it was enough to force him to hide.

This alley was too long to scale before they could chase me or draw a gun and shot, which was why I tried to open the backdoor of the building to my left when I see it.

After I spun the handle, I found out that that door is locked. It was too late to continue running, I think I will take the chance of breaching it.

BLAM

I fired another shot when I saw Darius peeking out from behind the corner, it send him hiding again while I kicking the door's lock.

The door was quite sturdy, it took me four kicks before I breached it, but again, my wounds seemed to make my attacks weaker. Soon after the door swung open forcefully, I entered it and started to run again.

Without knowing where I was going, I ran through this back room until I reached what seemed to be a kitchen. I kept rummaging inside this empty flat house through the corridor, the hall where there was a set of stairs up, and other rooms until I realised that except for the front door and the back door I came from, there was no other exit.

While standing clueless in the foyer, I noticed from a window that was facing towards the streets that Odi was approaching the front door with a gun in his hands. I didn't see Darius with him, and since Darius was following me into the alley, I believed Darius had been waiting for me in the back room.

I had trapped myself, I didn't see any place to go. The only place I hadn't

checked was upstairs, but even if I go there, I won't find any escape route.

That is actually not true. I might have found an escape route. Without much planning, I immediately ran away from the foyer and immediately headed for the stairs.

“Damn it!”

I cursed when I found Darius sneaking in the hall with a gun in his hands. Fortunately before he could fire a shot, I had retreated back into the foyer and hid behind the threshold.

Knowing his presence, I could now hear his footsteps. They were quite faint silenced by the carpeted floor, it figured why I did not realise his arrival earlier. He was approaching, while he was giving me suspense, he also gave me time to adjust my breath.

With both of my hand clutching on my gun's handle, I waited for his appearance, I could sense his presence behind the wall I was sticking on. And soon as I saw his head emerging from the archway, I swung my right hand towards his face, trying to hit him with the back of my hand.

CLASP

Unexpectedly, he blocked my attack by catching my wrist with his left hand before the back of my hand could hit his face, he had anticipated my attack. His grip was extraordinarily firm, no matter how hard I pulled my hand, I couldn't break free, not even budging his hand.

His expressionless, Neanderthal face did not scare me, but him slowly moving his gun in his right hand towards my hip did. I needed to move before he made a killing shot.

Soon as I realised it, I let my grip off and dropped the gun I held in my right hand. As the gun was falling, I took a step leftward while my right hand still clenched. With my left hand, I swiftly caught the gun before it could fall onto the floor and aimed it right towards his face.

Seeing my manoeuvre, Darius broke his grip and slapped my gun off my left hand with his. I had foreseen his movement, I didn't bother to look where my gun was thrown off, while he was being distracted, I swung my right hand to

seize the gun he was holding.

Swiftly, I managed to snatch his gun, but before I could aim it, he booted me hard on my right chest. His kick pushed me back quite far until I stumbled on a foot rest and collapsed on my back. His kick also made me lost the gun.

When I fell, I immediately curled my head forward, soon when my back touched with the floor, I rolled backward for an immediate recovery. Just then when I had stood on my feet again I realised how sore my right shoulder was.

Still unable to suppress the pain, I then noticed that Darius was approaching. He kicked the foot rest towards me, since I was unable to anticipate his attack, the footrest hit my face and I got thrown even further. If it were not for the couch I landed on, I may had landed on the floor.

Without slowing down and while I couldn't dodge, Darius continued attacking me by hitting my right temple, his punch was so strong my body got thrown onto the couch. Soon after I landed on the couch, he pinned on my chest and started pounding my face.

His barrages landed on the sides of my face without me able to block, while my vision started to blur, I blindly reached for anything I could use as a weapon. Fist by fist laid hit on my face while I was searching, I kept feeling the pain until my face felt like numbing. Fortunately my right hand touched an object, something thin, tall, and glossy on the end table beside the couch.

I closed my eyes soon after I grabbed that thin and glossy object and hit Darius's left temple with it. It broke into pieces and some of its shards fell on my face after it landed on his face. Only after I reopen my eyes I realised that I had hit him with a bud vase.

He did not scream in pain, but he took some steps backward while hunching down and holding the left side of his face. My vision was still blurry, but I needed this chance to finish him.

A part of me wanted to kill him, but my vision was still too blurry to look for the thrown guns. Instead, I decided to just approach him, wanting to just knock him off and prioritise my escape.

First, I dropped the broken bud vase in my hand and then approached him.

When I got close enough, I lifted his body by grabbing his shirt collar. Second, I furiously and repeatedly hit his temples. Despite hitting him repeatedly, he still refused to fall. I didn't think I will need three, but third, I slapped his ears with cupped palm full of air.

While his internal compass was temporarily broken, I toppled him by kicking his left knee. He fell forward, but before he could land on me, I dodged leftward, letting his face to land on the coffee table and made its glass surface to shatter, producing a loud noise, before finally he tumbled onto the floor.

I could hear him groaning weakly; he was still alive, but I didn't see the necessity of finishing him off.

CRASH

Suddenly, a staccato noise could be heard from the front door; the front door had been breached, that noise was my cue to start running. Immediately Iran away from the foyer and head towards the stairs.

BLAM

Step by step I ascended until when suddenly a gunshot echoed throughout the corridor, caused me to stagger. The bullet landed on the stair's step, very close but did not hit me. As I expected, Odi was standing on the corridor with a gun pointed toward me.

Before he could fire another shot, I increased my pace, fortunately it did not take many steps to reach the second floor. Soon as I reached the second floor I took the turn to hide and reach for my gun in my jacket pocket.

“Damn.”

I forgot to pick my gun back in the foyer and it was too late to recover them. I tried to look around and I found nothing that I could use as either offensive or defensive weapon that is slightly even effective against ranged weapons.

While thinking what I should do, I could hear footsteps approaching from below. Odi was approaching, and since I knew I couldn't fight handgun from distance; I chose to retreat. I ran again and circled the hall until I found another set of stairs, I ascended it and repeated the process until I reach the rooftop.

Utilising my speed of climbing the stairs, I breached the door that led toward the rooftop using my left shoulder. Upon exiting the building, the sunlight, while blinding, gradually fixing my blurred vision until I could see perfectly again.

BLAM

From here, I still didn't know where I should go, but hearing a gunshot from below set my mind and body to panic mode. Odi is standing just below the stairs. Luckily his shot earlier did not hit anything since I was standing a little far from the door.

His gunshot gave me cue to start running, these rooftops were tightly gapped or just separated by a tall wall which I could scale easily. I tried to run behind a physical obstacle so Odi did not have clear sight to aim.

Some buildings were taller than the other, while the others also shorter. This gave me both some advantages and some disadvantages, and since I just found out that I was also quite agile in climbing, I could turn many of the disadvantages into my own advantages.

Odi who I shot in the leg a few days ago was clearly having a hard time catching up, while his limit was his wound, my limit was my stamina.

After scaling at least more than ten of building's rooftops, I was starting having hard time breathing. I knew I hadn't lost Odi. I think he was behind me for at least five or six buildings. But when I saw a perfect resting spot, I hid behind a water tank tower and adjust my breath.

BLAM

Suddenly, another gunshot could be heard from distance. Oddly, the gunshot came from another direction. It was not coming from behind me, but it was coming from my left. Odi couldn't possibly take that shot this soon.

When I tried to take a look, I noticed that Darius was standing on the roof of a building across the building where I was. He had recovered this soon and now rejoined chase. Still, I didn't know how he managed to catch up this soon, but this was not the time to think about that.

I gathered all the strength still left in me, but even standing took quite a great effort. When I looked behind, I found that Odi was awfully close. Come to

think of it, Darius might have been distracting me while Odi was closing in.

Seeing that, I just had to start to force my body to move. I still didn't know where I should go to lose them, but a view in the far gave me an idea.

A few buildings from where I stood, I could see a construction site of a slightly taller building than its neighbouring buildings. Where the common buildings around here were at least three to four stories at most, that construction site was building a six stories building.

Its crane was operating to get the building material into its top, if I time it correctly, I thought I could make quite a distance or even better lose my tails there. But should I fail, I could lose my life there.

Having a solid plan, I started to run toward that construction site. Odi who saw me running also increased his pace while Darius was still figuring away to get to me.

Forcing myself to run was not a good idea, my lung had been critically exhausted, not even after three buildings I scaled I started to run out of breath. As my chest felt burning, I saved my stamina for when it will be needed most and let Odi to catch up with me.

It's just two buildings left before I reached that construction site and Odi was now awfully close. I didn't think I will have enough stamina to reach my destination, but I had put my wager on it.

I held my breath then use all the stamina I had left to scale the last distance and start to sprint. Only after a few steps later I felt another sharp pain in my head.

[Not now!]

The pain caused me to hallucinate, it tampered with my vision and gave me the illusion of the last building where I was sprinting and the construction site itself to rise into the sky, making the horizon look non-existent.

With the pain in my head and the sudden vertigo I had, running feels a lot harder. But despite a little slowing down, I couldn't stop. Especially since the crane's platform is starting to rise out of my reach.

Even worse, I could hear Odi's footsteps getting louder behind me. I didn't need to look behind but I knew that he was almost able to catch me.

Within the final steps, I adjusted my pace so when I jump, I will jump on my strong foot. Again, it caused me to slow down, but after I adjusted my steps, I started to accelerate again.

It's just a few more steps left, the platform was now seemingly out of reach even if I jump, yet none of us was slowing down. Everything will be decided when I jump.

“HAAH!”

When my right foot landed on the thinnest edge, I pushed myself upward as strong as I could. As if the high wind has not make scared enough, the illusion my mind created makes it looked like I was jumping between two buildings above the clouds.

I could feel Odi's touch trying to reach my heel, but failed to clasp it. He also made the jump, despite the platform being clearly out of his reach. Funny, I didn't need to reach for the platform despite it had risen too high. Only then when I felt like stepping on the air I realised that I had done something impossible.

[*Am I...*]

[*...flying?*]





Everything felt so light for me, like I could touch the sky, not the skies within the illusion my mind was playing, but the real skies.

Shame, that sensation did not last long, before I landed my feet on the platform, reaching for the cable that suspended the platform unto the crane, I peeked below me. Odi, after failed reaching for my legs, was starting to lose to gravity.

While falling four stories onto the ground, a tint of surprise could be seen on his eyes, just like it's there on my eyes. Honestly, I was just as surprised as he was.

Soon as I grabbed the cable that suspended the platform, apart from the illusion from fading, I could also hear the sound of Odi's landing. The sound was faint, almost non-existent, almost as if he never landed at all. Thus the lack of noise he caused made me want to take a peek into the ground down below.

While still grabbing one of the four branching cables that balanced the platform, I peeked from the edge. There I could see Odi, and the view of him was quite gruesome.

He was lying on his back on top of a stone wall fence that separated the building where we jumped with the street behind it, his hip spine had been bent backward due to getting spiked on the stone wall. Considering how high he fell and how deep the curve of his back, I could guess the fall broke his spine, killing him instantly.

I couldn't enjoy that view for too long, not only because it's making me feel sick, but also because I noticed that Darius was trying to get aim of me from the edge of the top of another building. Seeing that, I immediately hid behind the sacks of raw cement powder that were also on this platform. But after aiming for quite long, he never fired a shot.

The construction workers on the site soon began to shout at me when they noticed my presence on the platform, and soon the platform stopped rising. I had trapped myself, there was no escape from where I was, except from dropping myself five stories onto the ground or jumping back onto the guarded rooftop where I came from, and both had their own consequences.

[*Wait!*]

There was another way I could run, I noticed it when I accidentally looked upward. I could climb the cable that was suspending this platform and make my way to the construction site.

After I realised that I couldn't stay here for too long, I took a peek at Darius, but he has disappeared from the last place I saw him standing. I stood and try to look for him, but I couldn't find him anywhere.

Knowing I was safe, I immediately grabbed the cable and started to climb. It was not a long climb until I reached the crane's arm. Apart from the agoraphobia, nothing else was affecting me. I kept carefully tracing the crane's arm until I finally reached the construction site's top floor.

The worker I found on top of this site kept asking me a lot of questions, but I couldn't be bothered by them, I chose to just kept walking straight while pushing them out of my way and get to the ladder. Apparently they had not yet to build any stairs on this building, I had to climb down floor by floor by using a stepladder.

With every floor I descended on, there were always workers that scolded me, even some of them tried to catch me. But every time they tried, I kept breaking their clasp and pushed them away, which kept them from catching me for a while before trying again. But when I reached the third floor, they started to group up.

I kept pushing away and try to make my way through, but squeezing through them was keep getting harder. I got surrounded, the human wall of construction worker had prevented me from going anywhere. I kind of wished I had some weapon to threaten them, but then suddenly, a pull on my left shoulder forced me to look back.

Unprepared, a fist landed on my left temple right after I looked back through my left. The strike caused me to fall forward, away from the one who attacked me. I landed on the floor after none of the workers wanted to catch me before falling.

I tried to look at my attacker; that dark-skinned man wearing white short sleeved shirt, that man was Darius, with a gun pointed at me from his right

hand. So when he disappeared from that building roof, he was going here to intercept me.

Seeing a gun in Darius's hand, one of the workers tried to disarm Darius by throwing himself on Darius's right hand. But it did not take Darius much effort to break free and throw him onto the floor.

BLAM

BLAM

Twice Darius fired shots at the worker he threw to the floor, killing him instantly. Other workers soon terrorised by his action, without saying a word, Darius looked at them, silently telling them to go away.

Soon all the workers scrambled in chaos. I knew Darius will attack me again soon, and remembering the last time I clashed with him, I knew this won't be an easy fight.

Under the running workers, I hid myself while crawling, making myself harder to find, but ironically making it also harder for me to look at Darius. I focused myself on running away, I needed to hide before the workers clear from this floor.

When I saw one on my left, I crawled towards it and hid behind a wall next to some building materials and some other tools. There I started to adjust my breath and think about the situation; he had a gun while I was defenceless, but he didn't know where I was, I was at a slight disadvantage here.

Gradually, there were fewer and fewer workers running away until finally there was no more. As silence took over, I got to focus on thinking. It even helped me finding answer to my current situation. The best solution was by doing a sneak attack, but by the sound of his footstep within the silence, I believed he had anticipated that by standing in the middle of the room.

It meant I couldn't rely solely on sneak attack; the next option was surprise attack, not an ordinary surprise attack, but decoyed one. To my left, I could see some tools and building materials like bricks and sacks of cement, I thought I should use them.

I picked up a sledge hammer and wielded it at its heavy end in my left hand, it

will take some serious strength to swing it, but I didn't have any other choice.

Next, I picked one brick up and strafed leftward to the end of the wall, from there I took peek and I could see Darius was checking the walls very carefully.

When Darius was checking the wall across the room, I seized the chance to attack. Slowly I sneaked behind him, with a hammer in my left hand and a brick in my right hand. This room was too wide to scale before he turned around, and so, soon when Darius about to turn around, I pulled my right hand backward, gathering the strength to throw.

Right after Darius noticed my presence but before he's able to point his gun at me, I had swung my right hand and thrown the brick away. I aimed at his head or at least his body, but my throw was weak due to my wounds, specifically on my right shoulder. Instead hitting him on his body, the brick landed on Darius's left thigh.

Despite missing my target, it actually worked quite effectively, Darius got slipped and fell to his left knee. Although so, he ignored his woes and tried to aim with just one hand. Noticing that, I approached him while wielding the hammer with both of my hands, when I was just two steps away from him, I pulled the hammer rightward, building the momentum, and as I took the last step, I swung the hammer's head right towards Darius's right hand.

The hammer hit his right hand right before he could pull the trigger, I might even hit his fingers. The gun got thrown to my left, it landed across the room, just before the ledge of the building. The hammer was heavy, and with the condition of my shoulder, I was unable to immediately stop the hammer's movement.

It took me a while before I could swing again, too long in fact, before I was able to swing again and continue attacking, Darius recovered and jumped. He stabbed my stomach with his right shoulder quite hard I even dropped my hammer. I could see that he was trying to throw me, which was why I kept my balance by stepping backwards while he kept pushing me aback.

He had not given up on throwing me, he started to make it harder for me to keep balancing myself by pushing me while also shaking my body left and right. I tried my best to keep myself standing, and since keeping balance was getting

harder, I tried to make him let his grip off by elbowing him on his nape of his neck repeatedly.

Unfortunately, doing that makes it easier for him to throw me, I lost my balance and slipped rightward. If I fell, he will pin me again, which was why when I was about to fall, I locked his shoulder and his hip and utilised my fall to throw him leftward.

Both of us got thrown to the floor, neither of us was in condition to fight. It took us long enough to stand again. Usually I'm faster, my durability is unexceptionally high, but there are limits to everything; I was starting to get sluggish, Darius recovered faster. While I was still kneeling on one of my foot, trying to suppress the pain from my wounds, Darius had approached, he grabbed onto my shirt collar and pull me up.

While still holding my collar, he sluggishly but roughly hit my abdomen three times with his right knee until I felt numb from my stomach and below, making me barely able to stand, but he kept holding on my collar while I hold on to his wrists weakly. Seeing me unable to stand, he kept me standing by lifting my shirt's collar and stare at my eyes deeply.

“Damn you, I have never gotten played this well.”

He taunted while I could just listen, my legs were still numb, but I could still move my hands freely. Without responding to his taunt and while he was still distracted, I let my grip off from his wrist and slip them through in between his grip, thus breaking them away. Then I landed my hands on his shoulder, I gathered all the strength still left in me and pulled his shoulder towards me while I pulled my head backwards to build momentum.

While pulling his face towards me, I swung my neck forward and hit his left cheek with my forehead. Despite weak, since I landed my attack near the wound I inflicted back at the flat house, he knocked aback.

“You little...”

When I was coughing, trying to ease the pain in my chest and stomach, Darius swung his right hand, would've hit me right on the face if I did not evade by crouching and running below his fist. Unfortunately, I was unable to pull myself up, I lost my footing and had to throw myself to fall on my back onto the floor

right near the edge of the building.

I fell onto something hard, it's not part of the floor; felt bulgy and pressing against my back, it was uncomfortable. I wanted to rise but I couldn't, the pain all over my body made me unable to recover, I could only watch powerlessly when Darius shakily started to pick up the hammer that I dropped earlier.

Darius started to lift the hammer's head and adjusted his breath, preparing to attack. I didn't want to end here, I still didn't want to believe that I was a killer, but I couldn't even roll myself sideways just to evade.

There were five stages to mental breakdown; first is denial, the stage which I was on. I knew I didn't want to end this way, there had to be some way that I could do, but no matter how hard I wanted it, I could not do anything to make my wish come true.

Second is grief, denying a problem will not change anything. Thus denial turns into grievance, the fruit of incapability of changing the situation.

Third stage; bargaining. This was the most useless stage of all, when one was in a situation he or she was unable to overcome, despite creating it themselves, they still thought that there were still other ways to change the outcome by pleading to the higher power to change the situation. In my case, it will be Darius, but from his ferocious eyes, I could see that he is not in a forgiving mood.

Since having an episode from the earlier stages did not solve anything, I advance to the fourth stage; anger. This is the stage where one realises that no one could change their own fate except themselves and gets temporarily motivated, yet ironically this is also the stage where they realise that motivation alone without action won't bring a change. If one reaches this revelation and yet still could not overcome their breakdown, they will advance to the fifth stage; acceptance.

I was ready to just let it be, I didn't care about anything else anymore, I just wanted to end it and escape from all my problems. So, I exhaled the air inside my lungs slowly and clear my mind. But heck, even when I reached acceptance, I still couldn't lie comfortably.

Something hard was still pressing against my back and stuck between the

unfinished concrete floor and my back. Even after I adjusted my position, I still didn't find ease. But slowly, I started to recognise the contour and the texture of it.

So, back on those five stages; I think I left something out. Those stages only apply to the ordinary people, those who are extraordinary should be able to make their way out themselves, thus throwing themselves back to denial and change the outcome. I was extraordinary, I did the impossible, and could do it again.

“AAAH!”

Darius was advancing, he lifted the hammer over his head, ready to crush me using the weight of his hammer in one swing.

Knowing I didn't have much time left, I hastily reached the object I pinned under my back with my right hand. I rubbed over it until I found its handle, with one swift pull while raising my back to give it room so it could slide off from my back, I pointed its hollowed end at charging Darius and finally squeezed its trigger.

BLAM

It recoiled immediately after I squeezed the trigger and it blasted a bullet from its barrel. Without realising it, I landed on Darius's gun, it took me long enough to notice but I noticed it just in time.

The bullet I fired pierced his left chest, directly through his heart and shocked him. It made him unable to support the weight of the hammer, the hammer fell through his back onto the floor. Not only that, he also lost his balance, he tripped forward and falls to his face, onto me.

Ultimately, the last damage he did to me was by falling on top of me. It did not hurt, though it was awkward. Erratically, I adjusted my breath and soon as I had some of my strength back, I moved his rigid body off of me.

While still adjusting my breath, I rised and crawled to the nearest pillar to my left to lay my back against it. I gradually relaxed for twenty seconds. The more I rested, the more painful I felt.

This rest gave me time to enjoy the atmosphere, the high wind, the sound of

traffic in afar, and of the chaotic crowd on the ground really soothed me. But indubitably, the police will soon arrive, one of the building workers should have called the police soon after the first shot Darius fired here.

Right now, I had the chance to think about what happened today, I had more loses than wins. The win was that I was no longer followed. While the loses were; Vicky, I had officially become a killer, and I didn't know what should I do next.

I threw away the gun I held before I started to wipe my dried eyes with the back of my right thumb and rested my forehead there. I was desperate, more clueless and more lost than ever. I felt like I wanted to cry, but I just couldn't.

[Where should I go now? Damn it.]

Several times I rubbed my face, once in a while I reminisced about my last moment with Vicky, how she tried to cheer me up in her final moment. I was even willing to give up the world just to undo that.

Dwelling too deep within my thoughts and sorrow had distracted me, I failed to notice someone's presence behind a wall across this room. It was not until he had revealed himself I then abruptly looked at him.

“Who is there?!” I shouted.

The upper part of his body was still shrouded by the shadow casted by this floor's ceiling edge, making it hard for me to identify him. It was not possible, there was supposedly no one else following me, but there was something very familiar with his posture.

Before he stepped forward and revealed himself, I had recognised him. Before he stepped under the light and revealed his identity, I had no lingering doubt that that grey-shirt-wearing figure was me.

[What the...]

While smiling grimly at me, he approached until he was at least three steps away from me. His appearance was almost exactly like me, except for his grim expression and sans the jacket. I remembered him, he was from the dream I had a few moments back.





“What... the hell...”

Unable to cope with the sight I had, I whispered. I intended whisper in my mind, but I was too shocked that I whispered out loud.

“Don't be surprised,” he replied shortly.

“Wha— what are you?”

Last time I saw him, he was inside my head, inside my dream, yet now he was standing in front of me, in the same reality where I live. That feeling of doubt that I had made me try to rise and wanting to touch him, but before I managed to stand, he halted me by showing me his left palm.

“Don't bother to stand,” he said.

Another thing I noticed from him, when he opened his palm, there were distinct half-dried blood traces. I then remembered seeing him drenched in blood in my dream, only now not as much.

“I am not real,” he continued.

“What?”

Since I was still unable to stand, I fell back on my knee, and soon back lying on the pillar.

“I am not real; I am you. You're just seeing me because you need me.”

“I need you?” I sneered sceptically between my speeches. “How? I don't understand in what way I need me to think outside of my own head.”

“...” he didn't answer, but after a while, he started to chuckle softly.

“Answer me!”

“Oh, ———...”

[Wait, what?! He called me, didn't he?]

“Of course you know the reason—”

“Hold on a second!” Frantically, I hold him from continuing, I needed to hear again what he just said earlier. “What did you just called me?!”

“Excuse me—”

“What did you just called me?! You know who we are, right?!”

“Didn't you hear me?”

“No, I didn't! Say that again!”

“Fine... you asked for it,” he scoffed in reception, pausing for a second before he started to open his lips again and fulfill my request. “...

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“AGH!”

I feel like something just pierced my head, a very maddening noise suddenly conquered my hearing. Unlike before, when I heard my name being called in my dream, I usually hear nothing, but instead, I could hear a very maddening voice. The noise was so grating, like a giant ping, I had to cover my ears and curl forward until I lost my sense for balance and fall onto the floor, but it had no use since the noise was coming from inside my head.

[*What did he call me?!*]

Even while writhing, I tried to make out if I could recognise my own name amidst the noise, but nothing. Even after the ping faded, some of its echoes were still bleeping inside my head, it took me a while and a lot of erratic breathing until I had full control of my hearing again.

“What the fuck was that?!” I shouted at him angrily, but as I tried to raise my head again, I found that his expression had changed, from the pleasant but grim into cold and full of frustration.

SNAP

“Listen you little shit,” he snapped his right fingers in front of my face and started talking in menacing and cold tone, which scared me from interrupting, “no more questions. You thought about it earlier; you wanted to quit, you wanted to give up.”

“...” unwilling to cut in, I slowly rose and forced myself to stand. I don't like being looked down, not even by my other self.

“You couldn't give up, savvy? You will have to remember, remember the promise!”

“What promise?”

“I couldn't tell you, just like I couldn't tell you who you are,” while still trying to stand, he suddenly pulled my jacket collar and set me stand straight. He was supposed to be nothing but my imagination, yet he affected my physical movement. “Those are things you have to find out yourself.”

“But what I am supposed to do? I didn't know where I have to go next.”

“...” inertly he moved away his eyes from me, avoiding more eye contact, which made me uncomfortable.

“Hey, say something, will you!”

“Well, I will if I have—”

PIP-PIP-PIP

Suddenly, a faint ringtone took our attentions. We averted our looks from each other towards the noise's source; Darius's lifeless body.

“Well, ain't that convenient.”

“Huh?” while the ringtone continues, I moved my eyes back towards my other self since he was making such remark.

“There is your clue,” he said while pointing towards Darius before he turned around and left towards the same direction he came from. “My job here is done.”

“Wait, I still have more questions for you!” I tried to stop him, but he was now too far to reach in one step, I didn't even know if I could touch him. “What about that blood in your hand?!”

“Oh, these?” he turned around upon hearing my question, “these are not our blood, that I could tell you.”

“Wait—”

I wanted to catch him and took two steps trying to approach him before he suddenly disappeared into thin air under the building's shadow.

[*Damn it.*]

I tried to look around, but I only made sure that he really vanished completely.

Now that I was sure I couldn't find my other self, I immediately rushed towards Darius's lifeless body and frisk his pockets. I found a clamshell mobile phone in his jeans pocket, almost identical with the one I found on Odi a while back.

It vibrated every time it rang, I felt nervous, but I immediately flipped it open and looked into its screen. There, a series of numbers of irregular phone number were displayed under a name.

[*The Supervisor.*]

I breathed a sigh, trying to calm down, before I finally pressed the green 'accept call' button and terminate its ringtone and vibrations. Slowly and shakily, I put the phone next to the right side of my face.

“...”

For a moment I couldn't hear anything from the other side, I guess whoever there won't start talking unless I confirm who I am. Which is why after a brief awkward silence, I decided to begin our conversation.

“Hello?”

“...” still no response, I waited for a while, even checked the screen in case the Supervisor terminated the call, but the line was still connected. Feeling frustrated, I chose to say something again. “*It's you...*”

“...” before I could say anything, suddenly a voice responded. And hearing the answer, I didn't know what to say next.

“*Six, it's really you, isn't it?*”

[“*Six*”?]

“*May I ask what happened to Darius?*”

“Darius? He's unavailable to talk.”

“Oh, ah-hah-hah... you really are something.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Of course I'm talking about you, Six.”

“Six? Is that my name?”

“Oh, no. I just like calling you that.”

[This damn guy...]

So the Supervisor really knew me, and from how he played me, I already disliked him.

“What do you want from me?” I continued in frustrated tone.

“Relax, I just want to take you back in.”

“To where? Einhorn?”

“That's right, we are missing you.”

“Why do you think I would just comply?”

“Because I have what you want; I have your identity, I have your past, and I know what happened to you.”

“I'm not that cheap.”

“Really? You call unique answers cheap?”

“...” he really knew how to play with me, he knew that I couldn't get answers from anywhere else. I didn't like it, but I will have to take his offer. “Fine, what should I do then?”

“Come meet me, I'll be waiting for you here in Istanbul.”

“Istanbul? That is far away from here.”

“Just take a plane.”

“I don't have passport!”

“Sigh,” he scoffed cynically, *“we have taken care of that, just check Odi's or Darius's car, we had prepared your documents and some cash in case they have to take you here using public transport.”*

Either he's smart or stupid, he just gave away an exit door.

“Oh, by the way don't try to go anywhere else, if you use that passport, we could monitor your international travel—”

“DON'T MOVE!!”

Suddenly a loud shout took my attention, I was too occupied talking with the Supervisor I did not realise that an armed police had arrived.

“Six?”

“I will meet you there tomorrow,” at least I had refreshed a bit, my condition has improved, and I had my motivation back, it is due for some more action. “I have to run for now.”

“See you later then, ALLBL—”

“DROP YOUR PHONE!”

The police shouted an order, I had to disconnect the call and immediately remove the phone away from my ear. I raised my hands to show him I mean no harm then slowly lowering my hands onto the floor.

I was not surrendering, I lowered my hands because I couldn't see the floor while standing, by lowering my hands, I could look at the floor without looking suspicious. And by that, I had located the thing I need; the handgun that I had thrown earlier.

My opponent was just one police, I could easily take him down, but his shouts earlier must had alerted someone else. Also I believed the lower floors must had been secured, I couldn't risk losing time here, which was why I planned just to escape, but I still need that gun.

Seeing my hands lowered, the police started to approach me and lowered his gun. That was the opening I needed. I pushed myself forward, still feeling numbs here and there, but they couldn't stop me.

The police got startled by my sudden movement, yet his reaction was slow. I had so much chance to take him down, but I was focusing myself to run and get my gun.

It did not take much effort to get my gun, I didn't bother slowing down. After

I got my gun, I keep on running and head towards another opening for a door in the wall while putting the gun in my jacket.

I might had cleared myself from that unfinished room, but I hadn't cleared myself from danger. Remembering that the lower grounds must be protected, the police shouting for help after I ran proved that, which means I couldn't escape by descending the building; my plan was by going up.

Hastily I ran towards the ladder and climbed it, when I reached the upper floor I kicked the ladder down to make time and continue running and climb other ladders until I finally reached the roof.

There was a crane here that they used to move building materials, a platform was still hanging from its end, fully loaded with sacks of cement powder. That will be my escape route.

There were a lot of bricks scattered on every floor of this construction site, including in this roof top. But of them all, I only needed one. I picked one red and heavy brick up and enter the crane's cabin. There were lot of buttons and levers in here, but it didn't took me long before I found out which one I need to lower the platform and control the rotation of the crane.

After lowering the platform to the height of three and half floors, I used the brick I took to stall the lever used to rotate the crane so it kept rotating clockwise. The rotation was not fast, but I think it was enough.

I exited the cabin and crossed the crane's hand until I reached its end, unlike before when it was stationary, it's now a bit harder due to the wind and the vertigo.

Now I got to the hard part, I needed to climb the cable down until I reach the platform. It was not the friction burn that made climbing down hard, it was the rotation of the crane that made the cable swing around. Hanging on it felt like being man of jungle, except that I didn't have tree branches to land on.

BLAM

BLAM

As I climbed down, police officers were shooting at me from the floors of the construction site. None of their shots were hitting me, none even close. Shooting

from that distance is quite hard, not to mention the crane was rotating.

Finally I reached the platform, there I just needed to wait until the crane rotates at the angle I want. I kind of wished the crane would move faster, not just so I could not have to worry about the police officers shooting at me, but also because I might need more velocity to launch myself from this crane.

BLAM

As I was closing in towards the neighbouring three stories building, I fired my gun at the cable that suspended this platform. The cable was thick, even my grip barely encircled it, which was why I needed to weaken it. My first shot tore half the cable, but still enough to hold the weight of the platform and everything on it.

BLAM

Slowly but surely, the crane finally reached the angle I needed. I fired another shot, blasted the rest of the cable. Without a suspension, the platform started to free fall, but with enough velocity to reach the rooftop of the neighbouring building. Still, I had a problem; such fall will cause serious injury.

That was when the sacks of cement came in handy. As I was falling, I closed my eyes and laid my back on top of the sacks of cement. It was not pile of goose feather pillows, so the landing will be hard, but enough to dampen my fall.

CRASH

The platform which landed first broke first, followed by the sacks of cement, I landed roughly on top of those sacks of cement. The fall tore open most of the sacks, cemented powder particles disperse all over the air, making it hard for me to breathe and to see, but didn't stop me from standing and finding the rooftop door.

From here on, my escape became so easy, it felt like I had escaped.

Project

25 June 2010

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“Do you know what ‘Eve's rib’ is?”

[*Huh?*]

Amidst the rest I was having, a question woke me up. Only took me a second to realise that I had returned to that room and that I had been seated on the same rotating chair behind the same wooden desk across the same black figure of Graille Einhorn. But unlike the last time, Einhorn was sitting with me.

“*Pardon me, Sir?*” the lighter version of my voice responded. Just like before, although I'm seeing from my own eyes, I was not the one who's in control of my interactions.

“It's been a while since we met, I figure we should have a small talk,” he said while rotating the chair counter-clockwise a little bit, “do you know what ‘Eve's rib’ is?”

“*I'm sorry, Sir, I didn't get your question.*”

“Don't worry, I will explain,” he paused then rose from his chair and buttons the top button of his suit jacket. “In the event of Genesis, the creation of man, it's stated that the very first man was created from a lump of dirt.”

I didn't know why, but he liked to wander around as he speaks. I believed it was to lessen the tension between us.

“For a while, the first man who is named Adam lived alone in Paradise, but being alone is unbearable. So he asked his creator to make him a pair, but his pair was not created the same way as he did, his pair was created from a part of him; from his rib. And thus, the second human was created and was named

Eve.”

As he got to his point, he turned around and return to his chair but he's not sitting on it; he was still standing on its back and resting his elbows on the chair's neck while bowing. He then stared at me until I felt uncomfortable, after he noticed that, he rose and chuckled.

“I still don't understand.”

“It's fine,” he assured, “my point is, I am intrigued by your body.”

“My body?”

“Yes, you bear an eerie similarity to Adam,” he continued, “although it is unclear which rib was used to create Eve, but you were born with an odd set of ribs; the lower right part of your ribs is shorter than the others.”

Upon hearing his explanation, I remembered that I had that oddity when I was changing my shirt back at Vicky's apartment. Curiously, I roll my shirt to check, and surprisingly enough, my rib set is looked exactly just like what he described.

My skinny posture made it easy for me to notice that my left set of ribs had a convex lower rib while the right set is just flat. I started to see his point and it slightly frightened me.

“Uh, Sir, what are you implying?”

Fortunately, the other me was also wondering the same thing and interacted accordingly.

“Oh, don't worry,” he responded wittily, “I am not implying that you are a direct descendant of Adam, there are like one in a million cases of men not having Eve's rib like you in the world.”

“...” the other me sighed in contentment without saying anything, even though, it was quite a topic he's talking about.

“Also, I am more man of science,” he continued, “there are more evidence to evolution than there are to Genesis.”

“Evolution, huh...” my other voice remarked, *“I never thought of it but I don't think I like the concept of us humans being compared to apes.”*

“Oh, no, you are looking at it wrong.”

“Pardon?”

“It is a common misconception about the theory of evolution, many people think that we are evolving from apes, but actually the theory states that we are evolved from common ancestor and we are evolving along each other.”

“So, uhh, you're saying that... humans and apes are like... cousins?”

“Correct, that is the more precise interpretation.”

“Still, then, apart from our biological uniform, what makes us different from apes?”

“...” he paused, looking for answer and putting it into words, “I think there is one.”

“Which is?”

“Our awareness to the concept of evolution.”

“...huh.”

Come to think of it, he raised a good argument. Apes and humans are not too different, both of us values life, and by that we establish order, build society over a shared vision. But we are a much more advanced being, leading in the theories of existence.

“I know you might be thinking that we are more superior than apes, but I think we are also inferior.”

“What do you mean?”

“Strip our awareness out of us and leave us with just basic instinct to survive, we will be exactly the same like apes. The order of the apes is primitive, I acknowledge, but somewhat better. They only survive to maintain their existence collectively and not understanding it, I don't know, but for me that makes them could appreciate life more and capable to welcome death instead of fearing it.”

“So, you are saying that you'd like to live as an ape rather than to live as a human?”

“What? Of course not,” he said disapprovingly while still maintaining wittiness.

“Pardon my impolite assumption, Sir.”

“I don't mind, your opinion is not wrong, but what I want to say is that we are an organic life form that became too sentient of our own existence. When we reached the moment we began to questionise our origin and our demise, that was the moment we should have stop evolving.”

“...” I was deeply carried with our discussion that I was left speechless. *“Whoa, that is deep.”*

“...” hearing my remark also left Einhorn speechless, not too long before he exhaled a deep breath and approach his chair again after wandering quite far across the room. “Ah, that's right. I'm sorry, I got carried away. That was indeed too big for our small talk.”

“Well, Sir, compared to any talk I had lately, I could say without doubt that this is the best.”

“But, still, let's get to the point,” he said as he unbuttoned his top suit jacket button. “Let us talk about you.”

“Ah, that's right.”

“...” he maintained silence as he found comfort sitting on his chair while I didn't try to say anything, “okay, then. Six months mark, how is your progress?”

“Compared than the last time, I'm getting better at controlling it.”

“That is great to hear.”

“I rarely lost control, but I will keep learning.”

“That is good, but...” he put delay between his speeches.

“Yes?”

“I want you to put more effort in yourself.”

“Sure, I'll do my best.”

“Oh, no, that is not my point.”

“Huh?”

“I'm guessing you have been creating things, focusing on control?”

“Uhh, yes.”

“I want you to change your way, rather than focus on controlling, I want you maintain manipulation.”

“Manipulation? Come to think of it, I never tried that.”

“To grasp manipulation is a prerequisite to advance to the next phase, which is why I want you to learn it immediately.”

“Sure, I will get to it as soon as I could.”

“Splendid. It's been a pleasure, but unfortunately I am due someplace else,” he said after standing up and while buttoning his suit jacket button, I myself also rise since I noticed that Doctor Einhorn is leaving. “We'll see again in two months.”

“Very well, Sir.”

“I expect great things from you...”

Funny, as he was finishing his sentence, his voice was fading out along with the desk and the chair also started to disappear. My memory ended here, but I was still unable to leave this room, I was still trapped.

Since my chair had disappeared and the room was boundless, I chose to just sit cross-legged on the non-existent ground. I thought I will just stay here, but it occurred to me what will happen if I sleep here? Will I just fall into other dream or what?

Sitting alone for too long without distraction is boring, which was why I chose to lay on my back and cross my hands behind my head to use them as pillow. This dream will over sooner or later, which is why I chose to wait it out.

For a while nothing happened, but then gradually the room started rotating. The white ceiling started rotating overhead and the black bottom started rotating over my feet; just like noon changing to night.

“_____?”

[*Huh?*]

I heard me being called, it's that voice again; the gentle voice of the white figure.

Frantically I rose and looked around without finding anything, but instead of finding her, I started to notice small shining spots in the black sky.

[*Is that stars?*]

I asked myself, not to find answer, but to provide confirmation. The black sky was now decorated with stars, even the crescent moon was there; it's beautiful and very real like.

“———? Are you here?”

Now I could be sure, the voice is coming from behind me. Every time she appeared, she was always startling me, but now I was prepared.

Swiftly I turn around, making a perfect half-turn. As I expected, I found the white figure standing there, watching me timidly. Her appearance was not too different than last time, but unlike the last time, she was now wearing a tank-top under an unzipped turtleneck sweater instead of a blouse.

“*Oh, you found me.*”

“What are you doing sneaking in the middle of the night?! If someone finds out—”

“*You won't tell anyone, right? Besides, why did you follow me here if you know that?*”

“Of course I had to follow you, I'm not risking alerting anybody by calling you out loud,” she responded in irksome tone, “it depends on what are you doing here I will tell someone or not.”

“*Suit yourself, just don't interrupt them.*”

“Them?”

“*Shh...*”

“Interrupt what? Who's ‘them’?”

“*I said shush, you will find out. Just watch and don't say anything.*”

“ ... ”

She heeded my instruction and just felt the wind. The cold forced her to wrap herself in her sweater.

“If you're cold, just wait back in the house.”

“I'm not returning before I know what are you doing. What are we waiting here anyway—”

“Here they are!”

Suddenly, these flying small glowing things were appearing from all around. Their number kept increasing, enough to surround us, but will never enough to harm us.

“Beautiful, huh? They are always migrating through here in these times of the year.”

“Whoa...”

She was stunned in amazement, mesmerised and completely ignoring my explanation. Not long before she started to laugh innocently and raise her hands next to her face, enjoying the flickering yet neverending lightworks of hundreds of fireflies around us. It was a breath taking sight indeed, it's so beautiful she showed her true nature under her harsh and irksome talking tone.

“I take it you have never seen such view.”

“...” she stopped laughing and tried to hide her enjoyment, but then without any warning, she hit me on my right shoulder swiftly. “Shut up and let me enjoy this for a while.”

“Sigh.”

For a while, I watched her pirouetting under the starry skies, among the fireflies, until she finally tired. Despite looking out of breath after playing with the fireflies, I couldn't help but noticing that she was unable to hide her joy. She was unable to hold back her innocent laugh behind her tight smile.

Although she was unable to continue, the fireflies were still roaming around. She chose to enjoy the remaining of the show by sitting, she then ceased her laughter and adjusted her breath. With her calming down, I began to enjoy the

show, but I had to admit something was missing without her voice.

“Seriously though, why did you follow me?”

“I don't know, I just heard something from outside the house and noticed it was you.”

“And?”

“It just happened, I was worried, maybe.”

“But in the end, you're glad you found me, right?”

“Haha,” she chuckled lightly, “next time you will find me.”

“Don't be too sure about that, there is nothing I don't know about this place.”

“...” she did not respond. Together we silently continued to enjoy the view until the fireflies gradually disappear.

“Well, it's the end of that,” I remarked as the last firefly flickered out.

“Yeah, shall we go back?” she said while raising her hands at me.

“Sure.”

Unconsciously, I approached her and pulled her hands, helping her to stand. It's funny, even if she was just an illusion, her hands felt so real. Smaller and softer than mine, her hands did all the job of pulling herself to stand, she only used my hands just to support her weight.

“Thanks for showing me this,” she said with broad smile, those irksome tone was almost non-existent. “Come on, we should head bac—”

[Huh?]

Suddenly, her figure sunk right in front of me, not until the white bottom swallowed her into oblivion, but just until her head was below my foot.

Odd though, she was raising her hand, slowly her figure started to deform; her back long hair started shortening, her sweater also turned into a shirt, and slowly the white texture of her figure starting to get coloured.

She was not the only thing changing around here, the night sky turned blue,

and there was an earthly scene starting to construct itself around me. It was not too long until I realised that I'd been transferred into a memory that I didn't expect to remember.

After the scene got constructed, inanimate objects starting to appear decorating the environment. I was now standing on the ledge of a red container that was hanging over a cliff. I knew this scene, it was the scene where I lost Vicky.

[This is just a dream!]

I kept telling myself that and tried to take over instead of just saving her, which was useless. I saw that same despicable desperate smile she gave me before she fell. But instead of falling, the scene started to roll backward, and not in normal speed, but in fast speed.

In seconds, I reexperienced every event I went through up to that day in reverse; the highway battle and chase, that time I jumped the overpass with Vicky, the car chase across the town, the time we escaped her apartment, the time I surrendered myself and getting betrayed, the time I waited the whole night just to keep her safe, the time I had an argument with her, the time I took a walk and realised that I've been tailed, all those times I spent in her apartment. The reverse stopped when I reached the time when I was having one of the worst dreams I've ever had; the time I fought groups of soldiers in the white endless corridors.

The reversal stopped promptly when I reached the point when I was about to get shot. There was nothing I could do to stop it. The dream suddenly continued, the bullets that were suspended among everything else slowly gradually accelerated until they reached their actual speed.

When everything else was gaining speed, I thought I had a chance to dodge and change the outcome of the dream, but it turned out I was as fast as everything else, I was still unable to avoid the bullets. Before the same wall of bullets landed on me, I had closed my eyes.

“HAH!”

As I reopen my eyes, I was thrown back into reality.

Soon I remembered that I was sitting on a plane seat next to the window

which I took to get to Istanbul. While still sweating and breathing erratically, I also noticed that the other passengers to my right were giving me a concerned look.

First I calmed myself until I could control my breath, but before I managed to do that, the flight attendant had approached.

“Sir, are you okay?”

She asked me the standard question to ask to someone who looks like he or she is having a heart attack, but assuring them is hard, especially since I didn't have a good explanation to describe my condition.

“Yeah, sorry,” I lied while still slightly breathing out of control, which of course simply made my short answer unreliable. “Just a bad rest, you know; nervous flyer.”

Apart from giving a rational answer, I also tried to fake a smile, but I was too anxious to do it. Still, my expression seemed like making my lie more believable. The flight attendant and the other passengers next to me started to get a bit calmer.

“All right, then. I'll just inform you that we are landing in fifteen minutes.”

“Thank you.”

After she left, again I try to calm myself by relishing the view of the new land that was about to welcome me; Istanbul, a city once became the greatest place of pilgrimage about a millennia ago. I also couldn't help to think what happened in between now and yesterday.

Once I escaped from the construction site, I gave the impression I was going to descend the building I jumped onto through the building's rooftop access door, where really I was not going to do that. Upon entering the door, I waited there for at least two minutes before exiting into the rooftop again.

That way I tricked the police into thinking that I was taking that route, where in reality I descended the building using the fire escape ladder on its side and walked inconspicuously through an alley the police did not close.

After I eluded the police, I remembered that the Supervisor told me to search

Odi's or Darius's car since he said that they kept my travel documents there, which was why I chose to immediately do just that.

From there I retraced my steps to go back to where Darius and Odi derailed the black car I drove. But when I reached the junction where that happened, I couldn't find Darius's burgundy SUV; but the black convertible I drove was still there surrounded by police.

There I realised how Darius managed to chase me that fast after our last rumble, he was chasing me from above the ground on his car while Odi and I was running on the roofs.

I then continued my search by again retracing my route back towards the construction site, after walking around the block for a while, I finally found the SUV parked sloppily about three blocks away from the black convertible. To be honest, I did not realise I had ran that far.

Since the street was still occupied, I had to wait for a moment before breaking into the SUV and hot-wired it to move it to the back alley of some building several blocks away where I finally started searching. There were a lot of things there, I found two handguns and two dozens of their bullets before I finally found the documents and some cash inside a locked briefcase under the backseat.

Fortunately, I also found a first aid kit and some clothes there. This was exactly what I need, also I couldn't simply board a plane while looking messy. I then removed my shirt and opened the bandage that Vicky used to treat my gunshot wound from days earlier followed by cleaning myself using a towel I soaked with bottled water. Thereafter I applied some ointment onto my scratch wounds before wrapping my shoulder with some new and clean bandages again.

Then I immediately headed towards the airport, then discarded the car with every other weapon I had. Of course after packing some things I might need into a backpack I also found in the car before checking if there was another flight to Istanbul that day.

Unfortunately, they said there won't be another flight until tomorrow. Since I didn't have any other option, I spent twenty hours waiting at the airport until the

next flight is available.

Now, after four hours of flight, the plane I'm riding is about to land on Istanbul Ataturk Airport. Soon after I finished reminiscing, the plane had landed and docked, and now all the passengers are allowed to unboard.

Upon exiting the plane, I went along with the other passengers toward the customs and immigration registrations. I passed the customs easily since I only had my phone, my jacket, and my journal in my backpack. But honestly, I was feeling a little bit anxious when they checked my passport, I was afraid that they will notice its forgery, which was why I tried to maintain cool as the clerk was comparing the picture of me in the passport and the actual me.

The methods I used to calm myself included biting my tongue and holding my breath, so far it has done me wonders.

“Welcome to Istanbul, Mr Quentin, we wish you to have a great stay.”

The clerk greeted me unsuspectingly while handing my passport back to me, his greeting then lifted all the anxiety I had.

“Thank you,” I responded warmly after I release my breath and unbit my tongue.

Even after I passed through the immigrations, I still couldn't believe how this passport that was obviously faked had gotten me this far. Knowing how the Supervisor managed to get me through international database check, I knew I was fighting against something that must be powerful, both in influence and strength. I had to admit though, my profile there was very convincing, but I couldn't trust any of its record.

In my passport, it's printed there that my name is Theodore Quentin and I was born in 13 February 1987, even a picture of me is pasted and stamped over with a very official seal. There in my picture, I was posing expressionless wearing impeccable formal suit. But in my opinion, I looked a bit too young to be born in 1987.

After I reached the rowdy and busy airport hall, I immediately found a bench to rest then take out the phone I acquired from Darius from my bag. Back in Mombasa, I told the Supervisor that I will call him back after I escaped, I had

come halfway and now I needed to know where I should go next.

A television screen mounted on a wall near to me was showing a noon news program, this show took my attention since the highlight of their show is the story of a chaotic day on Mombasa. The news stated that despite the great collateral material damages, there were only six known fatalities. Among them, there were two gunshots victim, one jumper, one highway traffic hit, and two victims got thrown off from a cliff on the same highway.

Although the news anchor did not reveal it, I knew that those fatalities are Don, Marco, Odi, Darius, the truck driver Don hijacked, and Vicky.

Despite being distracted, I flipped the phone open to dial the Supervisor and try to ignore the news showing another story about increasing crime in local area. I noticed after I lost track of time that now was 13.32 in local time as the phone was beeping again and again while it was trying to connect and the news on the television was ending, it took me a while until a voice from the other side started to greet me.

“Hello, Six,” greeted the Supervisor, and again he called me with that annoying pet name of his.

“I've just landed, where should we meet?”

“Oh, welcome to Istanbul, then. Did you know, that this city was—”

“Where... should... we... meet?”

He started to toy with me again, which was why soon as I felt agitated, I assert dominance by talking coldly. I understood it was useless since I could only threaten him over the phone, but it was the least I could do.

“Direct, aren't you? Why? Are you in some kind of hurry?”

“Listen, I didn't came here to play games, I came here for answers. Since I'm already here, it is only matter of time until I find you. Trust me, if you play with me again, it would be unpleasant for you.”

“Yeah, sure... what if I just let you?”

“...”

He was right, apart from talking, there was nothing I could do. I couldn't come

with a good comeback, and certainly I didn't want to drive him off.

“Hahah, just kidding,” he continued promptly, “I was just playing with you. Ooh, wish I could see how you're looking right now.”

Hearing how he spoke made my heart boiling. I kept on fighting this strong urge to curse him and smash this phone. Good thing I could remember that I still needed to know his whereabouts.

“I will send you an address, you could meet me there.”

“How could I be sure you are not leading me into a trap?”

“...” he paused for a moment, “exactly the same reason why I couldn't so be sure if you will or will not kill me when you meet me.”

“ ... ”

After all these times he played with me, acting high and mighty, at least now he acknowledged what I was capable of.

“Just wait and trust me, all right? I will have to take care of some things first before I tell you where we could meet.”

“Why couldn't you just tell me now and I will get there in the meantime, that way I could meet you soon after you taken care of your business.”

“Nah, I will have to make a good impression with you,” he continued, “I will send the address in twenty minutes, all right?”

“Just—”

“All right, see you later.”

He one-sidedly terminated the call before I could protest, I tried to call him again but the call won't connect. Since I couldn't do anything, I put the phone into my pocket and just sit watching other people walking around in this enormous hall.

It was boring waiting like this. For a while I couldn't think of any other thing to do, but then I remembered about my journal inside my backpack.

I noticed that I hadn't updated the entry since two days ago, which was why I immediately took it out and opened an empty page next to the latest entry.

On that page, I wrote the latest update on my dreams. As I was writing, I realised that, I had to revise the earlier entry and added the dream where I fought groups of soldiers. I wrote about that dream on an empty page at the very end of the book. After I filled that page, I ripped the page and slipped it into the page where I recorded other dreams I had that time.

After that, I continued writing about the other odd experiences I had; the time I hallucinated and flew, the time I talked with myself, and the dream I had back at the plane.

That seemed to be all of them, I had updated the entries up until now. And without noticing it, twenty minutes had passed.

I then took out my phone and flipped it open. The screen showed that I hadn't received any message. But as I was about to fold it, the phone suddenly vibrated while ringing.

Promptly I opened it again and looked at its screen. There was a mail icon now, indicating that I had an unread message. I then navigated through its interface to open that message.

After I opened the message, the screen was now displaying a string of location address. Frankly I didn't know where that is, but I only needed to show this address to a taxi driver.

Seeing that now I had a destination, I immediately packed all my belongings back into my bag and then started to walk out from the airport. Not far from the airport's gate, there was a pool of taxis waiting for passenger.

I walked towards one of the unoccupied taxis and its driver approached me, and without delaying, I showed the middle aged taxi driver the string of address on my phone screen.

He understood that I was asking to be taken to the location in this address, he then admitted me into his car. While he was circling the car and walking towards the driver seat, I entered the back seat.

After I put my bag and settled in, the driver had started his car engine as I still put my phone into my bag. Slowly he manoeuvred out from his parking spot and hit the road.

He told me that this trip will take a while since the place I wanted is located at the other side of the city. Knowing that, I then bury myself within my own thoughts.

Riding a car slowly like this sure feels different than when I was racing back in Mombasa with Vicky. Losing her was painful, but it gave me a quite valuable lesson; I couldn't get myself too attached to something. That is actually not wrong, but the pain I will feel after losing it will affect me greatly.

The scene of the busy cityscape slowly changed into a quiet blocks of flat houses, we had moved from the uptown district to the middle class residential area. It took me at least forty minutes from the airport to get here.

After circling the block for a while looking for the address I gave him, the taxi driver then stopped in front of a flat house. After reaching my destination, I dismounted from the taxi after paying the driver.

This neighbourhood consisted of many flat houses. There were not so many people around in this street. If I were to hunt myself, this place will be perfect. Even though the Supervisor gave me his personal assurance that I could trust him, but I couldn't help to feel like I was being watched.

Why carrying my backpack, I approached the flat house door where the taxi driver stopped at. Since I didn't know which room I should buzz on to, I felt like I should call the Supervisor again. But when I looked at the resident names again, a name that attracted my attention more than the others forced me refrained from doing so.

In the resident list, I read a name that was slightly different from the others, a name that is tucked in between Adrienne Marsh and Akbar Anshori.

[*Arasaka Yuumi.*]

It is not like I knew who that was, I just feel that name is too out of place; too different with other names there.

Doubtful yet determined, I pressed the buzzer of resident 22 and wait. It was not too long until the intercom from that room connected with this buzzer.

“Yes?”

“I—”

“Good guess, Six.”

Before I could reply, the voice cut me off and continues speaking. From the response, it would appear that my guess was correct.

Also this might be too late to notice, but despite speaking in same tone and even called me with same nickname, the voice in the intercom sounded less husky and heavy, but sounded more feminine.

“Come in,” the voice invites.

Soon as the intercom deactivated, it buzzed and the front door was available for me to open. While it's still buzzing, I carefully enter the flat house.

Slowly and cautiously I traced the corridors, heading towards the stairs. From the room number, I knew that the Supervisor was staying at apartment 22, second floor. From how quiet this flat house was, I was almost certain that this was a trap, I wish I had a weapon.

As I ascended the stairs, I carefully peeked on the second floor and made sure that there was no surprise waiting for me there before I continued. Still being precautious, I checked the corridors too after I got onto the second floor.

There was one door left before I reached apartment 22. I strafed slowly along the wall towards the door, I even stick my right ear to it and try to listen for any suspicious noise from inside. Yet I didn't find or feel anything dubious, the apartment 21 was seemingly empty at the moment.

Despite so, I still continued to follow the corridor carefully, just in case, until I finally reached the door of apartment 22.

I stood in front of it petrified. I was sensing something uneasy is waiting for me behind it. Although I was feeling determined, I couldn't help to also feeling hesitant.

“Get in, Six! I am alone!”

After I swallowed my breath, anxiously I raised my right hand onto the door's handle. But before I could touch it, a voice suddenly called me from inside, halted me from touching the door handle. The Supervisor's voice was now

clearer than ever, and now, I couldn't doubt it anymore.

Again, the voice assured me, but still, I couldn't simply believe. Swiftly I continued raising my hand and gently I turned it.

The door was no longer holding to its sill. Cautiously I pushed it inside. From its expanding opening, I could gradually see what was hidden behind this door; first of all, there were no traps, only a normal room.

Behind the door was a tidy flat decorated neatly; floor lamp standing at its corner next to a window, a tall bookshelf almost as tall as the ceiling itself fully stocked with books, a couch next to an end table, a Persian carpet covering the floor, the fresh eye-relaxing lime wallpaper, some potted plants placed at the window, and oddly, static and faint magnetic hardware ambience.

Right from me were two closed doors, and on the left were two archways. While the first archway appeared to be a kitchen, from the second archway, I could feel a chilling breeze. From there I also felt chilly gaze, and after I approached it a little more, I found a middle aged woman wearing a white lab coat was sitting in there behind a desk where there is also another chair across her.

She was smiling sneeringly at me, her sharp eyes appeared shrill behind the lenses of her glasses. Despite so, her presence was calling, attracting me to come to her.

Behind her are two giant processing units that was almost as tall as the bookshelf, those processing units are the sources of the static magnetic ambient that I kept on hearing in this room. If I allowed to make a guess, that two monstrous boxes must be a pair of server computers.

A computer as big as that must be releasing a lot of heat, thus two air conditioners are installed in the same room, which were the sources of the chilly breeze.

“Good day, Six,” she said as I finally arrived in front of her desk. “Please sit down.”

There were also a lot of things on top of her desk, I couldn't help but observing them as I put my bag next to my chair and sit down on it; there was a

red laptop notebook in front of her, a Newtonian swing decoration, a touchscreen mobile phone, a stacked document shelf, a table lamp, and other small decorations.

Although many things were scattered there, it's still quite neat. But one thing that piqued my interest was what she put at the very centre of the desk, in the middle of me and her; a piece of paper, creased half horizontally and vertically on one side and creased diagonally on both corners on the other side, balanced on its central node to a pin like an opened umbrella and closed inside transparent plastic bowl.

“As you might have noticed, my name is Arasaka Yuumi.”

I was too distracted on that object that I failed to follow her, I was still busy observing it until she forcefully took my attention by snapping her right fingers in front of my face.

“It's a psi-wheel,” she said as she retracted herself after she reached at me to snap her fingers.

“What?”

“Psi... wheel...” she enunciated, as if I were a kid who is learning his first word, “it is used traditionally by many occult institutions to test if a subject possesses certain extrasensory perception ability.”

“...”

I was left speechless by her explanation, it was not long since I couldn't follow up she started to sneer and chuckle.

“Yeah, that is too heavy for you, isn't it?” she continued, “putting that aside, let us get to our point then, as you might have noticed, my name is Arasaka Yuumi.”

For the first time, I could follow her conversation.

“You are the Supervisor? The one I have been talking to?”

“That is correct.”

“Why did you send those assassins back in Mombasa?”

“Pff, ‘assassins.’ They are mercenaries, they were tasked to capture you, not to kill you.”

“With guns? Real guns?”

“They were briefed as least as we could give them intel, how they interpreted the mission is irrelevant to me as long as they complete the job,” she answered cynically, “like I said; mercenaries.”

“That is your job, to overview missions? For whose merit?”

“Well, more or less. I am assigned to supervise, err, dirty works for Graille Einhorn's organization in the eastern European region. You know, sometimes the high-ups had to do somethings out of public to maintain their prosperity. It could get messy sometimes, and you are just happened to be one of those ‘somethings.’”

“Okay, so now—”

FWOO

Suddenly, a staccato noise blows, conquered our conversation. Yuumi who was smiling cynically turned bright hearing that noise, she seemed glad that our conversation got disturbed, and my irritated face also amused her.

“Ah, wait a second. The tea has boiled,” she said as she rose before leaving the room.

I was left alone in her study. From her cynical tone, I knew I was still being toyed.

After being forsaken in solitude for a while, without having anything to do while waiting her to come back, Yuumi returned with a tray with two cups of steaming tea, two small bowls of sugar granule and sugar cubes, and a small creamer.

“In case you want it sweet.”

She served one of the cups of tea and the other sweeteners onto the desk in front of me, and took the other cup with her before putting the tray onto the credenza under the window. Later she started to gracefully savour her tea after sitting down onto her chair again.

“Aah,” she hummed in enjoyment, “it's Earl Grey, you know.”

“Are you done?”

“You want me to drink boiling hot tea like this? What do you think I am? An ignoramus?”

After I complained, she put the tea cup and its tray onto the desk. She then reverted her eyes toward me which makes me think she had done stalling.

“So, after you have me here now—”

“Two minutes.”

“What?”

“You have to wait for two minutes before drinking your tea so it reaches the best temperature, usually it's four minutes, but since we are drinking in an air conditioned room,” she answered promptly, “excuse me, you were saying?”

Without showing it, I gritted my teeth inside my lips. I also exhaled my breath sharply to constraint my anger. She had the nerve to keep provoking me, her tight smile showed that. But I had to remember that she said she could give me answers.

“Now you have me, what will you do to me?” I continued.

“Well, Doctor Graille Einhorn is badly expecting your return, so he enquired me to capture you since you were reported to be found near my operation vicinity.”

“You are returning me to him?”

“Yes, and like I said; we missed you.”

That is right, after all these times I thought I was fighting against her, I was actually fighting against Einhorn. But despite so, she said one thing that made me accepted her invitation.

“You said you could give me some answers, what about it?”

“Oh, yeah... that.”

“ ... ”

“I lied.”

CRASH

Hearing her answer made me unable to hold back, furiously I rose and use my right hand to sweep anything within its reach from the top of the desk. In one swift whip, I threw some of her desk decoration including the tea she served and its sweeteners.

A drinking giraffe stature tossed onto the wall to my left along with the tea cup and two bowls of sugar and creamer cup. They spilled their contents as the inanimate tea set got hurled, spoiling the wallpaper and the Persian rug. Still though, this mess did not compensate her deceit.

“Two minutes,” she continued while I could only stare at her angrily, “pity, if you would just waited ten more seconds it would have been perfect.”

“STOP TOYING ME AROUN—”

“I was not being serious!”

She tamed my roaring angry voice by yelling casually, despite she stopped me from shouting, my anger for her still persisted.

“You losing your composure is my enjoyment,” she continue in normal tone while raising her tea cup from its saucer, “also I just want to know how far Einhorn has taught you.”

“I killed four of your mercenaries! Trust me, Lady, you don't want to see that side of me!”

Despite all of my shouting and flailing, she kept gracefully sipping her cup of tea while ignoring me. This woman was lucky I was not holding to any weapon.

“Of course I don't,” she continued promptly soon after she finished sipping, “what I want to see, is that.”

She averted her eyes from me and laid her eyes onto the thing covered in the transparent bowl, the psi-wheel as she called it.

The bowl was sealing the psi-wheel inside from being pushed by observable external force, and I knew I did not get in contact with the desk's surface when I was sweeping half of its contents. Yet the paper which was balanced to a pin

inside the bowl has started spinning like a merry-go-round.

It kept on spinning in linear momentum, unlike a top which will topple soon or later, the psi-wheel was spinning without reducing its speed over time.

The wonder it brought gradually soothed my anger and nurtured my curiosity. And as I was calming, the psi-wheel was also gradually slowing down.

After watching it for a while, I noticed that Yuumi's pensive expression had turned bright; she was smiling broadly, filled with satisfaction.

“Yes, look at that,” she said slowly in creepy tone. And soon after the wheel lost its momentum, Yuumi returned her eyes to me. “Did you see?!”

“...”

“Oh, Einhorn, Yuuya... you did it,” she talked to herself.

“...”

“And you...” she suddenly turned towards me.

“What was that?!”

My question made her starts to chuckling ominously, although doing so, she lowered her face and shook her head, suppressing the impulse of bursting laugh out loud.

“Answer me!”

I shouted while slamming my hands onto her desk, but she only gave me her right index finger, signing so I gave her a while.

“Haah,” she sighed, successfully conquered her laughter. “Oh, look at those clueless eyes.”

“Who or what am I?! Did I just do that?!”

“Look, I said I was not being serious about lying that I couldn't give you some answers, but whoa, one question at a time. Just sit and wait.”

After regained composure and became dead-eye serious again, she reached to a cabinet under her desk after telling me to sit down. She bent so she could reach its hinges, but even after she opened it, she was still bending down.

“I apologise, okay? I had to harvest your anger so I could test you.”

“...” I didn't respond, though I couldn't simply forgive her.

While I was settling down on the chair, I could hear faint ticking voice as she bent down. I was guessing she was opening some kind of safebox with spin dial lock inside the cabinet, which explained why she was taking her sweet time under the desk.

Soon I heard another noise, despite faint like the tickings, it was a little bit louder. It was the click of the safebox unlocking, and after closing the safebox and the cabinet, she arose with a file folder in her left hand.

“This is what you want.”

She waved it in front of her for a while, showing it off before finally putting the file folder onto the desk. A clear print could be seen on the folder, and from what was written there, I was sure that that file contained the information I seek.

[ALLBLACK INITIATIVE]

[SUBJECT #6]

[PROPERTY OF EINHORN RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING]

[PRIORITY ULTRA]

[FOR THE EYES OF DIRECTOR G. EINHORN ONLY]

Knowing the existence of such file, I lost control. As if being driven by egotism and pushed by how sick I was after she toyed me all these times, I rose and jumped onto her desk until I lost my jump momentum and my left foot lands on my chair while my right knee landed on the desk's edge.

I used my left hand to maintain balance while my right hand stretched, reaching for the file folder while Yuumi was pulling it away from me. I might had been too focused on the file, I did not noticed that Yuumi has pulled a move, might even had predicted how I will react if she showed me that file.





CLICK

“DON'T MOVE!”

While pulling the file away from me, Yuumi also raised her right hand. Ever since she showed that file, I became too distracted, I didn't even noticed what she had done with her right hand. When she was showing me the file, her right hand was hidden under her desk, concealing an object she'd think she needed in case I acted like this, and her prediction was right on.

Seeing what she had in her right hand and how she was using it made me refrained from continuing to seize the file from her hand. Usually, neither it nor her sheer order will stop me, but there were several conditions that made me heeded her order.

Right in front of my eyes, a gun barrel was staring at me dead at point-blank range, but it's not what made me stopped.

When someone is holding a gun, it's a common code not to put their trigger finger on the trigger. Even I, who was suffering from amnesia, knew that. But apparently, either she did not understand that or she is really aiming for a kill shot; it was her right index finger lingering on the trigger of the gun she was holding that made me stopped advancing.

“Get back!”

Although it was unclear if she has released her gun's safety, I was not willing to take the risk. Slowly I backed away, getting off from her desk and raised my hands soon when I didn't need its support anymore. It was not until I returned to my side of the desk she removed the gun away from my face.

“Are we calm?” she asked.

Soon after she removed the gun, I lowered my hands slowly. And when she asked that question, I did not answer her orally, only a single nod while still maintaining my sharp look.

“If you want this file, it's useless!”

“What do you mean?”

“Take a look for yourself.”

She proceeded to throw the file across the desk where it then landed on the edge of my side of the desk. After she threatened me like that, she just gave me the file? Even after it landed in front of me, I needed to make sure she was not planning something by doing this. I looked at her trying to understand, but she only stared back at me while crossing her arms with the gun still in her right hand.

I dragged my chair closer toward the desk and slowly raised my hands onto the file, gently I remove the files from its folder and put the file on top of the empty folder. On the first page of the file, there was not too different from the print on the folder, except for one line on the bottom of the text.

[REDACTED VERSION]

Noticing that, I frantically flipped the other pages to see its contents, but nothing. Almost all the text, except for the section title, had been blacked out. I flipped and flipped through the pages until I found a page near the end of the document, where from the layout of it, I was guessing it was some kind of a biodata.

All the data is still printed; 'name,' 'date of birth,' 'height,' 'weight,' et cetera. But the records were blacked out like the rest of the documents.

“What the fuck is this?!” I shouted angrily after I rose, “where are the answers you promised?!”

“It's not my fault, okay! When you contacted me yesterday, I requested the company immediately for your files, but instead they sent me that.”

“Why the hell did you threatened me?! I could have died if you squeezed that trigger!”

“I know how hard you're longing for those files, I could see you are willing to kill for it, but I am not willing to die ridiculously for that.”

“FUCK!” I shouted.

Before I adjusted my breath, I tried to calm myself first. I tamed my anger by turning away from her irritating face and swept my hair backwards, soon after I had composure, I tried to control my breath.

“Look, I know how angry you will be if I tell you that I could not deliver my promise after you came this far, you might even killed me,” she continued in more composed tone, “but I really wanted to help you.”

“What should I do then? What could you do for me?”

“If it's answers, I am not in the position to help you, but I could take you to the one who could.”

“Einhorn, right?”

“Yes.”

Back in Mombasa, Jordan said that I was about to transferred to India before him and his companions found me floating on the oceans, it's like a quarter globe away. If I didn't accept, it will be the biggest goose chase in the world. It didn't seem like I had any other options.

“Fine, then,” I said defensively. To be honest, I preferred to know what happened to me first before having another confrontation with Einhorn, but I couldn't see how.

“Okay,” she continued after sighing, “I will arrange a transport to for you.”

“ ... ”

“It will take time, like two days or so.”

“So you're going to keep me here?”

“No way, this apartment only has one bedroom,” she said while opening a drawer under her desk, “I will give you cash for your expenses for the next two days.”

While she's rummaging her drawer, I returned to my chair and sit on it impotently. From the drawer, she took a thick brown envelope out and put it onto the desk before she slid it towards me. I was not touching it since I was still disappointed, but there is no other way.

“You seem troubled.”

“I don't know if you could help me with this,” since I was in a very low mood right now, I was no longer looking for explanations, I just want to be heard, “but

lately, I've seen visions that I couldn't understand.”

“Huh?”

“It's kind of hard to explain, sometimes I experienced these dreams where I recall some of my memories, one time I was talking with Einhorn, the other was me and this white figure I don't know who...”

“...”

“Not only that, this is rarer than those dreams, I sometimes hallucinates when I am awake.”

“And how many times did you have those?”

“Ever since I reached Mombasa, I think almost ten.”

“Do you remember all of it?”

“Yes, I keep a journal out of it.”

“A journal?”

“Yeah, a certain someone recommended me to write one. She said I might recognise a memory pattern or something which will lead to my mind recovery.”

“Really, now...”

Since I was talking lowly, I didn't notice it. But ever since I started to talk about the dreams, she was sounding so intrigued.

“Could I see it?” she continued.

I had to think for a moment here. If she asked for it two hours ago, I might have allowed her, but since I didn't want anyone to know about that dream about me fighting soldiers, my opinion had changed.

“No, I am not showing it to anyone,” I refused softly, “what do you want from it anyway?”

“Well, nothing of importance...”

“...” I didn't like the sound of her tone and where this conversation was going, I think I should end it here and leave. “Well, I think I will take my leave here.”

“You know, before I was placed here, I was a neurologist working for

Einhorn.”

When I was standing up after taking the brown envelope, her words stopped me from going to reach my backpack. If she's really a neurologist, then she is exactly what I need.

“I might be able to help you understand your condition,” she continued soon after she noticed that she just piqued my interest since I stopped, “all I need is your journal.”

“No, forget it.”

Upon hearing what she required to study my condition, I uttered a brief but sound answer. Since I wrote that soldiers entry, it became a non-negotiable term. Although I could just remove that page I slipped in, but I couldn't do it in front of her.

Swiftly I picked my backpack while also carrying the envelope in my left hand, I planned to leave this place immediately.

“I'm guessing you might be undergoing a neural defragmentation!”

“Huh?”

I turn around after I half-opened the front door, from there, I found Yuumi poking out from her workroom.

“Your mind might have been jumbled, but your brain is trying its best to reassemble the information it keeps,” she diagnosed shortly, “those lucid dreams is your brain trying to manifest and validate memories, while your dementia is caused by your brain being unable to differ actual memories and imaginations.”

“ ... ”

“That was just a theory, if you want me to make sure, I will need to examine your journal.”

Again, she showed a suspiciously great interest in that flimsy book I'm writing. My resolve was sound, I will not showing that journal.

“No, I'm not giving you my permission.”

“Six, wait—”

Soon after I said that, I immediately slid myself into the door's opening and exited from Yuumi's apartment. Frankly a part of me wanted to let her help me, but I couldn't simply give her what she required. So for now, I think I will settle with what I had, since soon I will have all the answers I want.

While walking towards the stairway, I put the envelope into my bag while also taking out my jacket. Getting out after being inside Yuumi's chilly apartment for a while left me with cold aftertaste that I couldn't shake off.

After wearing my jacket and putting the envelope, I started retracing my steps from the stairway to the front door while carrying my bag on one shoulder.

Once I was outside, I couldn't help but to have another look at Yuumi's window. It was not hard to pinpoint her apartment window from outside. From here I couldn't find her, I could only looking at the ceiling of her office.

I didn't know why I was doing this, but remembering I had two days to spend, I think I will start by finding an inn.

BUMP

As I was turning around, I didn't notice the presence of a girl walking in my direction. My sudden movement made our right shoulders to collide. It was just a small bump, barely even enough to knock any of us.

“Excuse me,” I apologised.

“It's okay,” she replied shortly while passing through without noticing me.

After that small obstruction, I continued walking casually looking for an inn. I knew I will not find an inn in a residential area like this, so instead I chose to keep walking until I find a taxi or any kind of public transportation.

I passed and crossed at least two intersections until I finally found a bus stop. I didn't know where I was going, but for now, I will just take it.

In the bus stop, there was no one else waiting, only me alone. Since I didn't know how long until the next bus arrive, I sit on a bench nearby. I kept on checking the street to my left to see if a bus was coming, until a vibration and a ringtone from my inside jacket pocket took my attention.

[What does that woman want now?]

I thought cynically responding Yuumi's sudden call.

[*Wait—*]

Apart from the different ringtone, I don't remember putting the phone inside my jacket. As far I as I could remember, I put the phone in my bag. Frantically I swung my backpack and start rummaging its contents.

Just like I thought, my phone was still inside my bag, along with my journal. After I confirmed that, I immediately check my left inside jacket pocket. From there, I find a basic candybar phone, still vibrating and ringing its monophonic tone while showing a series of phone number I was not familiar with.

Did Yuumi put this phone? I remembered she was very close with me when she served the tea, but even during that time, she could not have slipped this phone into my jacket. I then tried to remember any peculiar event where this phone might have been put there.

I got here straight from Yuumi's apartment, before that I was riding a taxi, from the airport and I never let my sight out from my bag. Except when I was in the plane, where there was a lot of strangers—

[*A stranger...*]

That was when I realised that right after I got out from Yuumi's apartment, a stranger girl bumped onto me, there was a high probability that she reverse-pickpocketed this phone into my jacket then. My encounter with her was so trivial I did not consider it.

Still feeling dubious, I slowly pressed the green accept call button and put the phone near my right ear.





“Hell—”

“What were you doing there?!”

“Excuse me?”

“What were you doing at Arasaka's place?!”

A faint yet harsh voice was battling against the sound of the winds so it could be heard, despite I could still make out the words from it, I was still having a difficulties understanding the meaning.

“I don't understand—”

“Are you working with Arasaka Yuumi now?”

“What? No.”

“Then what were you doing there?”

“What is it for you?”

“Just answer the question!”

“...” this voice was quite pushy, but since whoever-that-was managed to sneak a phone without me realising and also know about Yuumi, this person had to be well informed. “I was missing for almost two weeks, Yuumi was just helping me transporting me—”

“Two weeks?! You've been missing for more than one and a half year!”

“Wait, what?!”

“I was looking for you! Where the hell were you all this time?!”

“Wait! Wait! Who are you?! Why could you say I've been missing for one and half year?!”

“Don't you remember? Don't you recognise my voice?”

[No way...]

[It couldn't be...]

Being asked like that, I did recognise this voice. Now that I realised whose voice this supposedly to be, I couldn't simply just believe it.

“...” I swallowed some air, convincing myself I needed to ask this question, “are you... Eve's sister?”

“...” there is no respond from the other side.

“Are you still there?”

“...it's really you.”

She confirmed it.

This irksome and pushy, yet gentle and soothing talking tone... If I did not know better, this voice has to belong to the white figure.

Like a thousand thoughts raced through my mind; disbelieve, relief, heartened, and a lot of others converged inside me I didn't know what to feel. Although so, I was still having a hard time accepting the impossible, all these times I spent searching for her, yet right now she was the one who found me.

“It's really you... I couldn't believe it...”

“Tell me my name!”

“Huh?”

“You know who I am, right? Tell me my name!”

“Why? What happened to you?”

“I've been having memory issues lately, I don't know who I am.”

“...” she pauses, “Okay...”

My heart was racing out of control while my breath rate was extremely low, cold sweat running through my temple waiting for her to finish her sentence.

“Your name is

Anssen “fsc” Augustus

ALLBLΔCK

— PHASE#1 // Project —

TO BE CONTINUED...

Istanbul
(ch. ζ)

Mombasa
(ch. α, β, γ, δ, ε)

Where Six
was found
(ch. α)

The storm
was found
(ch. α)



Afterword

Hello, there. Anssen Augustus here. I will have to beg your forgiveness for the cliffhanger (lol). Without realising it, it has been 2 years since I began this web series. And it's printed now.

First of all, I thank you for being this light novel's patron. I genuinely wish that you enjoyed it and still willing to support it for the coming volumes.

...And I don't know what else to say, so I'll just tell you a little about the background story of this story.

Let us return to 2008. Back then, I was a huge dork. I read comics, played a lot of games, watched Japanese animes, read mangas, and Japanese light novels. Two and half year later on 2011, I get inspired to create something. But then again I was a huge dork and went overly ambitious. It crashed and burnt hard. But I didn't give up. I tried again, now as a web novelist, and this time it was better than the last time. Although when I try to read it again myself, I cringed.

Then, after grinding myself for three years, I dug up that story that got crash and burn. Polished it as neat as I can and as the result, the same story you just read. It was a passionate journey. I met a lot of extraordinary colleagues, my small world gets expanded... really, this light novel has become a life-changing experience.

I wrote this story on years of daydreaming, research, and my own vision. Many of the scientific elements were practically adopted from real life; the 6th chapter's psi-wheel, and—whether you believe it or not—the Eve's rib phenomenon. I have seen it myself really. But for now, I cannot disclose more. It's better not to think too much about it. Since it's just science fiction, pseudo-science, and authorial matchmaking (lol).

Anyway, that's it from this for this first volume. Once again, thank you very much for your support.

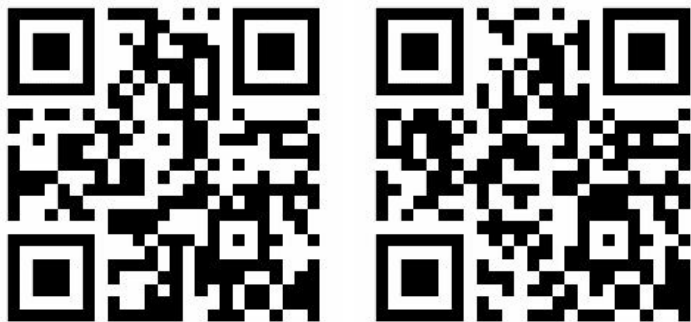
Red Lambda Thesis

ALLBLACK

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“What will you see when you’re dead?”

Last night I woke up without any recollection of what happened to me, just like I was born yesterday. But then again, you can't prove the existence of "past." You could have just been born right now and your whole memory was fabricated.

That is what I am feeling right now; lost, confused, and unsure. So yes, I might have just been born last night, but somehow my "past" is chasing me. I can't remember it, but apparently I caused a private aircraft to crash.

Damn, I wish I can just remember something! My name, I don't even remember my own name! But why? Why instead of my own name, I know who is responsible for what happened to me?

That's not all, I'm not even sure that I am human. Not after what happened today. I literally stopped rain. No, not like that. I didn't turn the weather from pouring to sunny, no. But I, how do I put it... I made thousands of raindrops cease to fall, suspending them into the air as if gravity don't work around me.

...

I understand, I think I will have to put an end to this.

My name is ———, let me tell you a story about me.

